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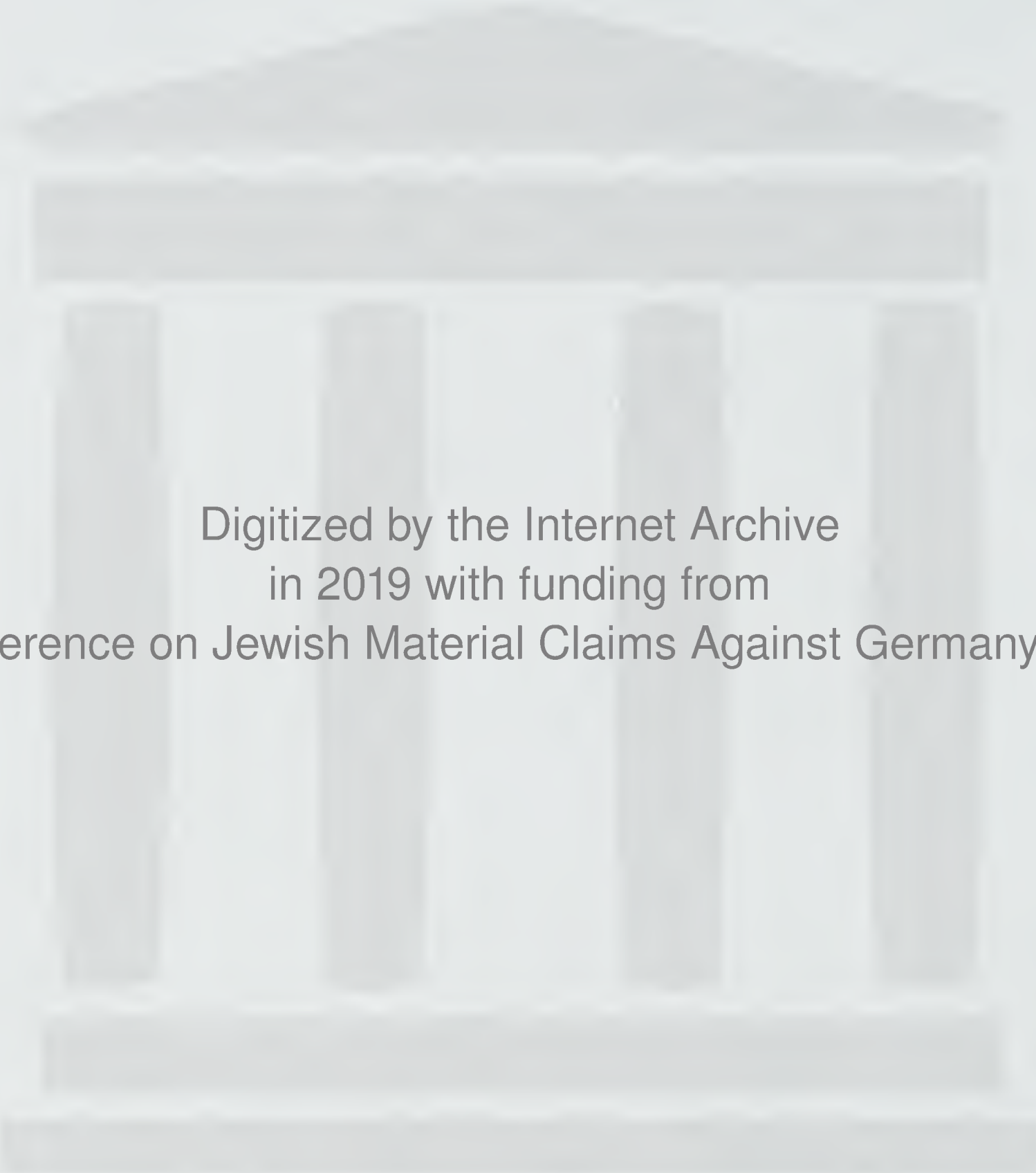


ועידת התביעות  
**Claims Conference**  
Conference on Jewish Material Claims  
Against Germany

## **Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection**

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## INTRODUCTION

This is a memoir that not only describes my youth as a Jewish boy growing up in a small, Northern town in Poland, but the story of how my parents, younger brother and a little sister as well as my grandmother were wrenched out of their upper middle class existence and murdered by the Nazis. This is not only a description of the years I spent in a Ghetto and several concentration camps, but a story about surviving. I am a Holocaust survivor. That I did survive is partly due to some last second decisions I made when facing the unimaginable. It is also the story of how I rebuilt my life after being liberated by the Russian army.

The Holocaust taught me the lesson of a Roman proverb: "Homo hominini lupus est" (one human being is a wolf to another one). I learn that many human beings have an insatiable hunger for power. I saw this hunger in the sadistic eyes of many "ordinary" people. I also witnessed great courage in the face of death, and unyielding heroism in the quest for life in the actions of many "ordinary" people. So, this is also the story of man's inhumanity to man, but also his kindness.

To paraphrase General Dwight Eisenhower, who witnessed the carnage shortly after the liberation of Dachau: Today I am a witness to this horrible inhumanity, which should be remembered because maybe someday it will be denied. I do testify today that it has happened.

This is my testimony, which I dedicate to the six million Jewish people who died at the hands of the Nazis; and all the non-Jewish victims who perished at the hands of the same executioners.

This is also written in tribute to all of the fallen heroes of allied armies who died to liberate us, and in loving memory of my family.



**THE BARBER OF GOERLITZ****BY KASRIEL K.EILENDER, M.D.**

“To be, or not to be...”

William Shakespeare, Hamlet

I was born in 1923 in the capital of East Prussia, known as Koenigsberg, which in German means “the Mountain of the Kings.” This German province was on the border between Poland and Lithuania, but my parents actually lived in the small Polish town of Suwalki. However, it was common among the middle class to seek the medical services of German physicians in East Prussia. I was the eldest of three children, which included my brother Gerszon and my sister Esther.

We lived in a single-family house. The population of Suwalki was mixed among 30,000 inhabitants. The majority were Polish people, but there were also Germans, Lithuanians and old-fashioned Russians exiled by the Tzar many years before my birth. The Jewish population was about 11,000. Some of them were quite wealthy and involved in a variety of businesses which included lumber, wood products, export, textiles, mills, shoemakers, tailors, bookbinders and a few lawyers and doctors. There were, however, many very poor people living in our town, some of whom used to come to our house about once a month to get donations from my maternal grandparents, who lived with us. There was also a large garrison of military forces set up, since Suwalki was a border town.

For its size, Suwalki was a rather sophisticated community where several cultures coexisted. There were churches, synagogues, Polish elementary schools, Jewish elementary schools and one high school. Many cultural events were held including concerts, lectures and sport activities such as soccer, kayaking and skating involving nationally known teams.

Once, as part of the Tzarist Russian Empire, our city was known as a gubernia, a provincial capital. The area covered approximately 6,875 square miles. Until 1386, the province was a part of the Lithuanian Duchy. During the period of 1402-1413 and 1420, wars continued between Poland, Lithuania and East Prussia that resulted in many broken pacts. Napoleon had chased the Prussians out and the region was under the domination of the Russian Empire. In 1920, after the Russian Revolution, the region returned to





the newly independent Polish State. The first mention of Jewish inhabitants in Suwalki was in 1808, a number totaling 44 people.

My father, Josel Mordechai Ejlender was born in 1895 in the little village of Sztabin. He was the eldest of three sons and his father, Elkona was a very religious and poor man who immigrated to the United States in 1906 and his wife Cypora followed a few years later. When he died in 1943, my grandfather left an estate worth \$3.00. My father's two brothers Arthur and George came to the United States in **TK**.

I remember my father as being a very astute and kind man, who was well respected by many members of our mixed community. He spoke fluent Polish, German, Russian and Yiddish and was very involved in local and Jewish politics. I often think he would have made a very good attorney if given the opportunity to study law. I remember there were many people who used to visit our home to ask my father for legal advice and general guidance. He was in the lumber business, and used to export a great deal of wood to East Prussia, as well as England.

Through the years, my father befriended quite a number of interesting German businessmen, who used to visit him. There were those such as Mr. Schultz who was in the First World War and who took a special interest in me as a child. I was particularly curious about his artificial rubber hand resulting from a war injury. I recall another businessman, Mr. Knopf who arrived from East Prussia to see my father one-day in 1936. My father was at work in the lumber-cutting mill, and I enthusiastically volunteered to take Mr. Knopf over there, so I could have the opportunity to ride on his motorcycle. Three months later, I received a kayak as a gift from him. There happened to be a river running near our house known as the Charna Hancza. It wasn't long before me and my brother went on the kayak, and promptly fell into the water. This was the first and the last time we used the boat, since it was immediately taken from us by our parents.

My mother, Sarah Blacharski was born in 1900 in the town of Augustow. Nicknamed, Sonia, she was the only child of Benjamin and Eiga. Her father was a businessman who exported fish from nearby lakes to Germany. I remember my mother as being an educated, attractive woman, who was an avid reader. She was especially interested in the lives of royal families. Etiquette and good manners were very important to her and she tried to instill these values in all of her children. My grandmother Eiga was a kind, soft-spoken and very religious woman. She was the one in our family in charge of the cooking and her





specialty was *chulent*, a typical Jewish dish consisting of meat, potatoes, fat and beans stewed together for 24 hours.

My grandfather Benjamin loved music, especially the opera. On four occasions, he visited the United States, where he had an extensive family. Considering the times and circumstances, my grandfather was a rather progressive man who had many friends among the Polish intelligentsia.

My family and our community considered Germany to be a civilized and industrial country that they envied and admired. My father used to bring us fancy toys from East Prussia. When I was 13 years old, I had a Bar Mitzvah. In front of our many guests, My grandfather Benjamin proudly held up the telegram he received announcing my birth as well as a photo of the German nurse who took care of me. My grandfather was very fond of and attached to me. He used to say we had a friendship similar to the one that King David and Jonathan enjoyed together. Following Hebrew public school, I matriculated to a government high school, commonly referred to as a *Gymnasium*. It was only for boys and you were required to wear a uniform. We had a curfew and our upbringing was very strict.

A free and independent Poland did exist between the wars from 1919 to 1939. The Russian Tzars had controlled Eastern Poland for hundreds of years; Germany dominated the Western part, and Austria controlled the South. While the Polish population as whole knew what it meant to live under oppression, it was especially difficult to be a Jew and a member of a minority group. German propaganda escalated the pre-existing anti-Semitism with all kinds of printed inflammatory articles and pamphlets in the Polish language. At the universities there were “numerous clausus,” enacted which greatly restricted the number of Jewish students allowed to enroll. It was widely known that Jewish University students had been ordered to sit on the left side as a demeaning gesture. But often, they chose to stand up during the lectures, and sometimes the Jewish students were beaten up by their Polish classmates. It is ironic that when Hitler came to power, Marshall Von Hindenberg, the president of Germany until his death in 1934, wrote a letter to *the Fuhrer* requesting that the children of Jewish veterans of World War I be allowed to finish their studies at German universities. Permission was granted.

As the German anti-Jewish propaganda spread, the atmosphere in Poland, especially in the border areas, was becoming increasingly tense. My town was located in an area surrounded by many forests and lakes. On one occasion, the students from my high-school class went for an outing to the nearby countryside. I got lost with a Polish classmate until we found our way back to town in the evening. The



next morning when my Polish gymnastics teacher spoke to me, he shook me a little bit and said: “You cannot afford to do these things, because you have to hold on with your hands and feet to this school since you are a Jew, and by the way, Hitler will soon come to you.” He was right. Hitler came to my people and to me, but he also came to him and his people. During World War II, about three million Poles had been martyred, killed, beaten, and persecuted. The Polish people had been proud and patriotic. They fought back on many of the fronts during the last War, and credit should be given to the Polish nation for never having organized any auxiliary SS troops, as other East and West European countries had done.

On September 1, 1939, it happened. Hitler’s Germany attacked Poland with three huge army groups: one from the North, one from the West, and one from the South. Since we had been in the border area, my parents, myself and my siblings tried to move farther away from the German border to the Southeast into the area of Grodno, to the small city of Indura where we had some relatives. We stayed there until September 17, 1939, at which time Russian troops invaded the Eastern part of Poland. After several days, we trekked back home to the North. We had a horse and buggy, and were advised by a Soviet General to travel only on the main roads to avoid being robbed. On the way we mingled with marching Russian troops, vehicles, tanks and artillery. We were stopped and questioned several times by Russian troops who searched us for weapons. We finally came back to our city of Suwalki.

Around the beginning of October 1939, my father went to City Hall, where there were Russian officials, and asked them what would happen to his business and the wood that he had in certain forests. He was told that there would be no problem, and he would be able to continue his activities. This turned out not to be true, since the Communist Regime of the Soviet Union was strictly against private business, regardless of how small.

Because of the Nazi persecution, a string of refugees from the German-occupied Western part of Poland was flowing into the eastern part occupied by the Soviets. There had been Jewish people, as well as Polish, with some belonging to the Communist Party. The Soviet authorities looked with great suspicion upon the refugees crossing their demarcation zone. They believed that there were many spies and saboteurs among them that might be harmful to their country. Ultimately, the Soviets closed the border between the occupied zones of Germany and Russia.

Meanwhile, rumors spread that the city of Suwalki, along with the outlying districts, was going to be incorporated into East Prussia, according to a change in the German-Soviet treaty. As the citizens





expressed their concern, the Soviet political commissars gathered together many of the townspeople in the center of the city, and assured us that wherever the feet of Soviet soldiers stepped, they would never retreat. As usual, it was not true. After several days, we noticed Soviet tanks and trucks moving toward an area 30 kilometers from Suwalki to the town of Augustow, named after Polish King August. Finally, the authorities admitted that this area was being incorporated into German East Prussia. Panic spread, especially among the Jewish population. The Soviets granted us permission to go along with the troops. They expressed their willingness to give trucks to anybody who wanted to go with them to transport furniture and other personal belongings.

My father was not very sympathetic with the Communist Regime, and was reluctant to accept the offer. Nevertheless, realizing that there was no future for his family under the Germans, he agreed to move to Augustow where the Russians would be stationed. It was the city where my mother was born. We still had some relatives and friends there; however, we became refugees.

I was happy that I could resume my curriculum in the Polish government *Gymnasium* in Augustow. The school was taken over by Russian civilian authorities and the language used was gradually changed to Russian. I tried to learn the language by reading newspapers. There were still many Polish teachers that remained at the school. However, we noticed that many Polish students were missing. We learned that the Soviet border troops and the NKVD (Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennch Del or Komissariat of Interior Affairs) arrested those suspected of being Polish patriots, and sent them to Siberia. Some of the local communists, who knew my father, denounced him, and he was called into the NKVD office. He was told that he could not stay in a border city because he was an untrustworthy person and must move with his family a distance of 103 kilometers from the Soviet-German demarcation line.

As the German front troops moved into Suwalki, two officers were billeted in the house of our cousins where there lived two unmarried sisters and a third sister with a husband and two children. When the two officers moved in, they asked about my father and were told that he had left town to go to the Russian side of the demarcation line. The officers were the sons of Mr. Botchwina from Koenigsberg, East Prussia who was a business associate and friend of not only my father, but also of my grandfather. They warned our relatives of the danger in staying in Suwalki and that they should move to the demarcation line on the Russian side. As mentioned before, the border was closed. Many of the border troops were very hostile and some did not speak Russian well since they came from different areas of the vast country of the





Soviet Union. The two German officers took our cousins to the border in the middle of the night and spoke to the commanding officer. At this time, the German and Soviet troops were on friendly terms. They let my family into the Soviet side and they joined us. Sadly, all of them perished later in the Holocaust.

As part of the Third Reich, Suwalki was renamed Sudauen. The remaining Jewish people in the town had been evacuated, and sent to the center of Poland to Lukow and other localities belonging to the district of the city of Lublin. It didn't take too long before all of them had been exterminated in one way or another. While my grandfather died of natural causes, my maternal grandmother, as I know from witnesses, was just shot along with other victims in a forest at nearby Lomza. The Polish citizens of Suwalki didn't fair much better. Many of the high school students joined an underground organization and planned to blow up the movie house where German soldiers used to go. They had been turned in by some informers and most of them had been sent to the city of Koenigsberg, East Prussia, where they were executed by guillotine. These facts have been described in a book by a former Polish student from our high school [NAME OF BOOK].

There was a Nazi campaign to eliminate Polish intellectuals: professors, doctors, politicians and priests. The principal of our government high school and many teachers both male and female were sent to concentration camps, and only a few survived.

With great sadness, we had left Augustow in May of 1940 going into unknown exile. My maternal grandfather, who was born in Augustow, and his ancestors, who had lived there for many years, had just died, and this made parting much worse. We went to Slonim, a district town in Western White Russia. Originally, the city had about 25,000 inhabitants, a mixed population comprised of 15,000 Jews, Poles, White Russians and some gypsies. The district of Slonim was situated between two rivers, the Niemen and the Dnieper. It was a vast land known for its heavy forests.

Ages before the Second World War, Nomadic tribes, Slavs, Lithuanians and people of Teutonic origin inhabited this land. During the 10<sup>th</sup> century, battles raged between different principalities: Russian, Polish and Lithuanian. In 1241, the Tartars had conquered the region led by Batu Han. The Russian tzars reigned here for 120 years, followed by German occupation in 1915. After the First World War in 1920, Poland incorporated the entire region into its borders until September 1939, at which time the Soviet Union occupied the area. From June 1941 to 1944, Germany took over and started a wave of terror not only against not only the Jews, but also against some segments of the non-Jewish population.



The German forces captured Slonim on the afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1941. Originally, frontline troops began sporadic and unorganized persecution and killings of Jewish citizens. However, very soon they started a systematic and efficiently planned Nazi terror campaign. They enacted an avalanche of edicts and special regulations. All the Jews had to wear two yellow patches, 10cm in diameter, one in front on the left side of the chest and the other one on the back on the right side. Anyone who disobeyed would be shot. Jews were prohibited from walking on the sidewalks and a ghetto was organized. It was divided into two sections. The first one was inhabited by so-called useful, qualified workers and the other one housed the rest of the population.

At 5 A.M. on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1941, a large group of SS men started a rampage into Jewish houses, taking everything they thought was valuable, chasing all the people into the streets and herding about 1,200 young men. They told them that nothing bad would happen and that they were going to be sent on a work mission. They were driven away to an area about eight kilometers from the center of the city. As the men did not return that night, about 20 women went to search for them. Some of the peasants showed the worried relatives exactly where there were three fresh mass graves. They were shocked to find some yellow patches, shoes and traces of food lying on the ground. The women went back to the ghetto crying and as they arrived there, hundreds of people had been waiting for the news about the fate of their husbands, brothers and fathers. The fate of these men was a horrifying wakeup call that we could not trust anything the occupants said.

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Alfred Metzner was a simple German who was a former taxi driver and gardener. At this time, in Slonim, he was an active translator and also a supervisor of the Jewish workers at the headquarters of the military police. Metzner usually incorrectly translated the interrogations of Russian prisoners of war, as well as some of the statements made by civilians. He was, therefore, responsible for many deaths.

The *Final Solution* as conceived by the Nazis called for the very active participation of civilian Nazi sympathizers in the occupied areas. These individuals were more than willing helpers in the eventual atrocities. Some of them held grievances against their former Jewish employers and some had the feeling of power when they held a rifle or machinegun in their hands, and they murdered people with impunity. Many





of them were made into auxiliary policemen who used to rampage through Jewish houses in the ghetto to rob, intimidate, beat, and occasionally shoot the inhabitants. The people of these victimized communities, including those of Slonim, had no illusions about their fate. They no longer trusted the authorities, the police or even their former neighbors.

As thousands of people tried to run away from the Nazis, my father decided to settle in Dereczyn, a small town northwest of Slonim, part of Soviet White Russia. In past centuries, this area was located between the borders of the Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania. It was a flat land, full of lakes, rivers, forests, and half of it was wilderness. Little towns with scarce populations, and small old fortresses were scattered across this region. The borders of this White Russian territory had never been exactly defined. During the last 600 to 700 years, it was first a part of the Lithuanian Kingdom, and then it belonged to Poland. During the partitions of Poland, centuries ago, it was dismembered and incorporated into the Russian Empire. Some historians say that the beginning of the settlement of the people in this region was somewhere between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Dereczyn was built on the crossroads of commercial tracks leading to other settlements and larger cities. After changing hands so many times, the entire area then became the property of the Polish aristocratic family by the name of Sapieha. There are still remnants of their palace in Dereczyn. It was a time of relative prosperity in the region, because the rich landowners employed many people, among them some Jewish artisans. However, the Polish uprising against the Tzar's regime caused the expulsion of the Polish nobility and the confiscation of their possessions, including the destruction of some of their dwellings and palaces. The final delineation of the borders with Poland took place after the Bolshevik Revolution, when White Russia became one of the 15 Soviet Republics. After the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution, the Western part of White Russia, where Slonim and Dereczyn are located, became a part of Poland again. This lasted until the beginning of the Second World War, at which time the Germans occupied it in June 1941.

On September 17, 1939, according to the agreement between the Soviet Union and Germany, Poland was divided between the two giant countries. As the Soviet Red Army came into Dereczyn, the majority of the population very enthusiastically greeted it. This euphoria didn't last too long. The reality of the Soviet communist system came into focus, dampening the population's enthusiasm and anticipation. Commercial free trade had been immediately abolished. Private stores were closed. There were huge



shortages of many items, which caused long lines of people waiting to get any of life's necessities. When we arrived at Dereczyn, the city had a mixed population of about 3,500 Jews, Poles and White Russians. Until this time, they lived together in peace and harmony. The reception by the Jewish inhabitants was friendly and warm. My family and I stayed with a widower and her son, sharing one room and a kitchen.

This way of life was very hard for most of us, especially for my father who was a businessman with international connections. At this point, my father had no work, and he was afraid that he might be declared a traitor, since he was, according to the new regime, a *capitalist*. My brother went to junior high school, my sister attended an elementary public school and I went to a neighboring city, Baranowicz, where I attended a government high school and lived as a boarder in a Jewish home.

On June 10, 1941, I graduated from high school. Since I was a good student, instead of getting a diploma written in White Russian, I had the privilege of having my diploma written in Russian which I thought was more prestigious. I came back home to my parents. In the meantime, my father had gotten a job in Slonim providing equipment to bakeries, and on June 20<sup>th</sup>, he had found an apartment there and finally we could all be together.

On Sunday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, a beautiful sunny day, I walked with my father in the main square of Slonim. Suddenly, at noon, the public address system announced there would be a very important message by the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs, Viacheslav Molotov. As we stood and listened, we could not believe our ears. Molotov declared that Germany had attacked the Soviet Union and was bombing many cities. The Germans had also crossed the border with army units.

With this news, people started to run around town in panic, mostly going to stores to get some extra bread and other food supplies. My father said to me: "You know, it's not fair. We finally have an apartment here and we are now forced to leave it". While we were walking across the bridge that afternoon, we heard a NKVD soldier shouting, "Bombs! Bombs!" I turned, and saw that German bombs were dropping on both sides of the bridge. We later told the landlord that, regretfully, since the war had started, we were unable to remain in the apartment, and we would have to return to Dereczyn. We decided to stay with my mother's cousins in Slonim for a few more weeks.

By June 25, there had already been street fighting in Slonim between the Soviet troops and the Germans. As much as it had been surprised and misguided by its leadership, the Red Army put up a very good resistance. We ran to relatives in another section of the city. I, with tremendous sadness buried my





new high-school diploma in the cellar. It was already known that the Nazis did not trust educated people. The German front troops, many of whom did not know what a Jew looked like, began randomly shooting young and old people who looked Semitic. In the process they also murdered scores of non-Jews.

After several weeks, my parents, decided it would be safer to send me, my brother and my sister back to Dereczyn with some other people, where there was a better possibility of getting more food and a roof over our heads. We still had our small apartment there. They joined us a week later. We transported our belongings in a small carriage drawn by a weak horse, so we all had to walk.

During the 32-kilometer trip to Dereczyn, we saw the carnage brought on by the Germans: bodies of horses and soldiers, burned-out tanks, abandoned artillery pieces and machineguns. It was a horror. For some reason the German troops we saw along the way did not bother us.

Later, our neighbors and friends told us that on June 27<sup>th</sup> the Germans entered Dereczyn by opening with heavy fire in all directions. They ordered both Jews and gentiles out of their houses and had them gather in a church. At this point, the Germans selected people who had been “suspects,” according to their criteria, as well as separating Jews from non-Jews. It appeared that the Germans planned to burn the church with the people inside.

Suddenly, Russian artillery shells started to explode around the church, hitting the neighborhood houses, which caught on fire. There was confusion and panic among the Germans. The prisoners ran out from the church to the safety of whatever remained of their homes. The Germans started to withdraw. Some breakaway Soviet Units encircled the city and finally occupied it for a short time. The Germans moved out to the city of Holynka, 10 kilometers to the south. At this, time they did manage to round up 140 Jewish residents of this small community, and shoot them, burying many alive. Shortly thereafter, the Germans recaptured Dereczyn.

As I heard this story. I realized that on our way back from Slonim to Dereczyn, I had seen the elevated earth on the graves in Holynka, which meant that some of the people were alive and had tried to get out.

After the Germans returned to Dereczyn, all refugees who escaped from the German-occupied regions had to step forward. People who did not adhere to this order had to be pointed out by the Mayor of the city, Mr. Lewandowski. Naturally our family belonged to that category. Mr. Lewandowski was a native of Poznan, and before the war he managed the post office in Dereczyn. He continued this job under the





Soviet's rule and befriended my father during this period. Being present as the above edict was announced, he did not point out our family. About 16 people stepped out on their own will and were shot by the Germans. Two days later, Mr. Lewandowski sent my parents a sack of flour, which was a treasure at that time.

This was just the beginning of the horrible events to come. After the combat troops moved eastwards, the specially trained members of the police, SS and Gestapo arrived from Slonim. They had also been assisted and supported by some members of the local population.

One day, my family and I along with all the Jewish inhabitants of Dereczyn were gathered in the marketplace. The leader of the German persecution team presented us with an avalanche of edicts, threats and orders. No sooner did he finish his oration, when a Polish local policeman asked: "Shall I start shooting?" An interpreter gave the answer, "Not yet!" At this point the entire crowd was dismissed with the strict order to wear a yellow round patch 10 cm. in diameter. One patch had to be worn on the left side in the front, and one had to be placed on the right side of the back.

In addition, the Nazis proclaimed that all Jewish males age 15 to 60 had to start each day at 7am with forced labor. The men were to be used according to their skills and their experience. In reality it was a method of cruel harassment since we had to dig ditches, and then fill them back up. We also had to carry stones from one place to another, without any purpose. Many of the workers didn't sleep nights, and would get up at 2 A.M. because they were afraid to be late for work upon penalty of being beaten to death.

Eventually, the Germans ordered the creation of a "Judenrat" (Jewish council), which was routine for all the communities in the occupied region. It was a practical and essential instrument for the Nazis to channel their demands, because orders to this body put more pressure on the community, and helped the Germans gain control of all aspects of its existence. These unfortunate delegates were a tool, which the Nazis used to extricate fines, contributions, as well as relay their cruel orders to the rest of the population. It was a very thankless job, because we criticized many of these council members for being used by the enemy. There were many instances in which the authorities were not satisfied with the council. Then its members were promptly executed and new people were appointed.

Most of the Polish peasants who brought their produce to sell at the market had the satisfaction of watching the Jews clean the streets of horse manure and perform other dirty jobs. Besides the physical



ordeal, lack of food, and crowded quarters, many of us suffered from the intense fear of doom and a premonition of death.

As time went on, there were more and more rumors about atrocities being committed by the Nazis. Just after the Jewish High Holidays in 1941, a group of workers had been taken in the morning to go for their usual toiling and abuse, and they did not return for at least 36 hours. Naturally, the families were full of fear, thinking that their loved ones were already victims of the murderous treatment. I was one of these workers. We had been taken into a forest a couple of kilometers from the city, and we had to dig a pit 45 meters long, 20 meters wide and about 4 1/2 meters deep. One end of the pit had a ramp where trucks could unload material and possibly people. Actually, as we later found out, this was a large grave prepared for all of us by the Nazi authorities. However, as is human nature, we could not believe the worst. Many elderly people who remembered the First World War said: "No, do not worry. The Germans used to do the same, digging big areas for storing potatoes." Nevertheless, many of us believed it was a preparation for the extermination of the rest of the Jewish inhabitants of the region.

We were being guarded by a few SS storm troopers and by the local police who were mostly White Russians and Polish. The worst one was a tall fellow by the name of Swiderski. He exhibited the cruelest behavior, which superseded that of the Nazis, exemplifying how our non-Jewish neighbors and friends turned against us.

Eventually, the Jewish population was forced to move into a restricted area of the city, to be isolated from the rest. There were sporadic attacks by SS German police, who beat people up and looted everything that could be carried away. Soon, a new group of about a dozen German policemen arrived in Dereczyn and took over the administration of the city and vicinity. They no longer trusted the Polish members of the police, and they only employed White Russians to help them with their bloody work.

A young police noncom, former barber from the city of Goerlitz in Silesia was second in command of this newly arrived group. It is known in Europe that barbers are supposed to be very polite, even subservient. But here we had this individual, who was typically Aryan in appearance with blonde hair, blue eyes, clean-shaven, and dressed in an impeccable uniform. It is a known psychological fact that power degenerates and corrupts human beings both in war and peace. It is the same for everybody in every walk of life. It affects national leaders, businessmen, professionals, bookkeepers, barbers, and shoemakers in the





same fashion. A uniform and the power it symbolizes can alter the personality of the one who wears it one way or another. “The Barber of Goerlitz” proved this point. This is what I call him even today. His real name was Fritz Figas. Upon his arrival, he immediately started a reign of terror.

There were also several Austrians among this band of newly arrived police officers, as well as one Polish speaking German. The rest of them were German and they all had one goal: to destroy all the Jews in the district and then go after the other “subhumans”. This “team” had moved into the newest building in the town, which was the school. They used about fifteen Jewish girls as servants, who did everything from washing clothes, serving food, and peeling potatoes to other menial tasks. These Germans lived the life of leisure and affluence, while their comrades on the eastern front had been dying at the rate of about 10,000 a day. According to the Nuremberg Laws of Segregation of 1935, it was a crime severely punished by Hitler’s regime for intimate contact between Jews and Aryans. In spite of it, this did not deter Fritz and his comrades from using some of the Jewish servants as mistresses. They also used to force hundreds of young men to do all kinds of heavy work, without any real purpose or necessity.

Fritz Figas would come out and inspect the work of “the modern slaves” after lunch. Once in a while, he would shoot people without any reason. It appears that this was his pleasure, which became a habit and an expression of his power over life and death for so many human beings. His underlings were no better.

After the War, a Jewish survivor told me the following story. On January 21, 1942, an elderly Jewish man walked into a house where he was arrested and accused of having typhus fever. Apparently, there was no basis for this. The police took him to the station. He was isolated. It was known that Germans became afraid and panicked over typhus and lice, because they had suffered a great deal of it during the First World War. The commanding non-com of the police and Fritz Figas were notified and the latter ordered that this person be brought to the Jewish cemetery where Figas would personally “take care of him.” The local police brought the man to the cemetery where he was shivering from the cold. He asked permission to pass some urine before he died. The permission was granted magnanimously. After breakfast, Fritz was brought in by sleigh to the cemetery. Here the former barber from this small city of Goerlitz, now the commanding officer in charge of the Final Solution, in theatrical fashion shot this poor, innocent old man at point-blank range. Obviously, this kind of ritualistic execution had made the barber’s day.



Life was getting much more precarious and difficult in the ghetto. If some mother went out of the ghetto to the market, which was not allowed, to get milk for her hungry child, she would be shot on the spot. Anybody who ventured out of the ghetto to get food from a Christian acquaintance would be shot without any hesitation.

The news from the neighborhood communities had become more alarming. There had already been “aktion”(mass murder) of men, women and children. The ordinary Germans with their local helpers had been rewarded for the number and rapidity of the many human lives they destroyed. We all were waiting consciously or subconsciously for our turn. Whenever people heard a car engine, they thought this was it; they were coming already. People were sleeping in their clothing waiting for death.

On one early, cloudy morning my father and I went to work as usual. However, instead, of working, we had been herded together with three hundred other Jewish males into the courtyard of the headquarters of the German gendarmerie (military police). After a selection process, my father and many others had been released.

Under heavy guard about two hundred of us were marched 35 kilometers from Dereczyn toward Slonim. As we were leaving the town, some mothers and sisters ran out from their houses to say good-bye. The guards opened fire on them. I never found out how many were killed or injured.

I was brought to the Ghetto of Slonim and worked in and out of the Ghetto cleaning rubble and helping to demolish damaged houses. Many other people, who came with me to Slonim were placed in a nearby work camp. Some of these workers actually escaped back to Dereczyn. When Fritz and his German police found out they had run away, the workers were arrested together with their families and put overnight in police headquarters, where they were beaten mercilessly. Then, in the morning, they were taken to the big, notorious grave. Some of them started to run and were shot or wounded and remained lying on the ground. The rest of the people, about two hundred of them, were thrown into the big pit and shot with machine guns. Afterwards, bloody Fritz came in, threw his leather coat among the Jewish workers and said, “Clean the Jewish blood out of it quickly.”

Not everyone was killed. One woman, who was lightly wounded and survived this massacre, came back to the town and was secretly put in the hospital. The Germans found out about it, took her out to the cemetery and shot her. My father told me this story, while risking his life to visit me in the Ghetto. This was the last time I saw him.





According to the witness testimonies after the war, the Nazis eventually pursued the non-Jewish people and they therefore conducted a registration of all Russian citizens who remained in German-occupied areas. The Nazis collected about one hundred people, mostly former soldiers and officers of the Soviet army and executed them. The rest of the Russians escaped into the surrounding forests. This is how the underground army started. It did not take long for the rumors about their activities to reach other communities. As a result, many of the younger Jews saw no other alternative but to join these ranks of the Russian underground. However, there was only limited opportunity to get out into the forest. It was a very difficult task, because the partisan groups would not admit anyone without arms and to get arms was almost impossible. However, as necessity is the mother of invention, some of the Jewish mechanics and other workers employed in the huge staging areas and collection centers of Soviet arms, started secretly to remove parts of machine guns, bullets and grenades, and hide them in forests, yards or cellars. Slowly, the future guerillas left the ghetto and disappeared into the forests.

Life there was not easy either. The weather was cold and wet. There were many marshes, and the locations had to be changed frequently to elude search parties. The Germans preferred to keep out of the forests, because they were afraid of being ambushed. However, at times a huge SS formation, together with the local police, used to penetrate the areas occupied by the partisans. There used to be battles, ambushes, and shootouts, with many casualties on both sides. The partisans suffered from hunger and all kinds of diseases but had no meaningful medical help. There were people who were new to this type of life. Many of them had to be taught how to use rifles, machine guns and grenades. It was a long and bitter road to life and freedom and many did not survive. They followed the Soviet slogan: “It is better to die standing than to live on your knees.”

To annihilate the Jews, the Germans divided people into two groups: useful and nonuseful. Useful meant that these individuals still had some chance of living for a time while still being employed in the German war effort. Nonuseful people had to be immediately exterminated. This gave some people doomed for extermination false hope.

When German troops marched into White Russia and the Ukraine, they were welcomed with kisses, flowers and music because they believed them to be liberators from Stalin's regime. Now Stalin was gone, he was far away and powerless, and here was Hitler with his own ideas to implement. Little did the





local population know that Hitler had planned to later leave the Slavs as subhuman slaves of the mighty super race.

As the German occupation continued, the honeymoon with the local non-Jewish population weakened. Realizing that Nazism was worse than Stalinism, a segment of the local population rose up to defy the new regime and with the help of former Russian soldiers and officers started a partisan movement. Unfortunately, all of the Russian soldiers and officers were later captured and executed.

Indigenous local Nazi collaborators, such as members of the auxiliary police force, were often more monstrous than their German masters. For example, in the spring of 1942, Fritz Figas approached the head of the Jewish Counsel and demanded that certain quantities of gold be delivered directly to him at specified times. To enforce this edict, Fritz Figas would enter the Jewish community with his thugs and he would randomly shoot people to death as if using them for human target practice. To further demoralize and degenerate the Jewish community, Fritz Figas would force the Jewish Counsel to send Jews out on the street to clean up the blood and to remove the bodies.

[Here footnote: Memorable Book of Dereczyn Jews, Published --- here fill in]

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Slonim was a district capital that was a mother ghetto to which satellite ghettos belonged, among them Dereczyn and many other smaller communities in the region. Many people used to say that they had been in the Slonim Ghetto, when actually they had been in one of the satellites.

The commissioner of Slonim district in occupied White Russia Gerhard Erren belonged to the civilian administration. His main responsibility was to organize, implement and conduct the mass annihilation of its Jewish population. Remarkably, although Gerhard Erren never witnessed an execution, he was the planner and organizer of each execution, which took place in Slonim and surrounding many smaller communities. Erren followed up on each “action” as the Nazi’s called the mass murder of women, men and children. Each evening, after the execution, the commissioner chaired a meeting, which included representatives of the army, military police, as well as the local auxiliary police. Some individuals have been praised and rewarded for the efficiency with which so many victims were killed. He also reprimanded those who felled behind in the number of killings.



White Russia was divided by the occupying authorities in many other districts similar to Slonim and have been administered by a general commissioner Wilhelm Kube. He was a lawyer and close friend of Hitler. He was a rabid antisemite and did not live much longer than his victims. In September of 1943 during a big party in his residence in Minsk, the capital of White Russia, a female Russian partisan who apparently work for a while as a maid put an explosive device under his mattress. When Kube went to sleep he was killed.

In the summer 1942, it was feared that the time for the Jewish people in the Ghetto of Dereczyn was running out. News came that the Slonim Ghetto was in flames and it was thought that Dereczyn would be next. Some time remained, however, because the murder machine did not have enough steam or people to do everything simultaneously and because some individuals were still useful to the Nazis.

The Dereczyn Ghetto had over 3,000 people crowded in to about 40 houses. About 500 people lived outside of the Ghetto.

In charge of the police team was a heavyset man, not so young, called Schibilla. He was a Polizeimeister by rank. He had a Jewish mistress and one remark of his sufficed to predict what the fate of the Jews was going to be. One Jew drowned himself instead of suffering and Schibilla remarked, "He is a smart man, he did the right thing."

The slogan that a drowning man will grab a razor blade to save himself has some merit. For a long time before the event of the final solution for this community, people had been building shelters in little houses, in bigger houses, some in cellars, attics, behind false walls, in empty barrels, using all kinds of ingenious ideas to hide. A small number of people thus had been saved and escaped to the forests. However, the Germans discovered most of the shelters and the people perished. The "civilian commissioner" Erren and his helpers and advisors had planned the mass murder action of Dereczyn Ghetto, and they prepared pits and graves for the bodies. Several hundred mobilized collaborators led by German police officers and some other volunteers, among them an army sergeant, a notorious murderer called Muck, surrounded the ghetto in the early morning hours of July 29, 1942. The murder method was clearly described in the testimony of Alfred Metzner, who took an active part in many "actions" including Slonim, Dereczyn and many other communities in the region. The military police chief Schibilla took pictures all day during the slaughter.





It confirms what Daniel Goldhagen stated in his book, “Hitler’s Willing Executioners” and what Professor Christian Browning described in his book, “Simple German People, 101 Police Battalion.” Many of them were simple people who learn very fast how to become willing executioners of the regime.

Many of these Germans came from decent families, were married and had children, and yet they committed heinous crimes, killing, maiming and torturing women, children, the elderly and sick. Naturally, we should not blame the entire German nation. There have also been people who opposed this lapse of humanity toward the Jews, gypsies and Slavs. The present young German children and grandchildren of the perpetrators should not be blamed for it.

The testimony of Alfred Meizner, a former gardener, as well as a taxi driver from Berlin, who during the war had the immense power of deciding the life or death of many innocent people, is just an example of all of these actions by many simple German people in most of the occupied eastern European countries.

There were instances of German military police, army, railroad personnel, some of them volunteers, acting as many collaborators, which means mimicking the work of the Einsatzgruppen and their notorious annihilation SS groups. They rampaged during the war in the Soviet Union and became well known for their mass killings of mostly Jews, Russian prisoners of war and Russian officials. Some of the leaders of these destruction groups have been tried in Nuremberg. Among them Olendorf who had two titles, Doctor of Law and Philosophy. Thirteen have been sentenced to death, but only four have been executed. The rest slowly, but surely, have been released from jail, thanks to the leniency of the American High Commissioner of the American occupied zone.

Many of the perpetrators have survived the war and have come back to the fatherland. One of those was Alfred Metzner. He settled in Augsburg, Bavaria with his Russian girlfriend. Apparently, he had a lot of money, gold and jewelry taken from his victims. The couple enjoyed a wonderful life till his girlfriend got in a fight with her lover and reported him to the U.S. military authorities. Alfred Metzner was arrested and interrogated on March 10, 1947. I am enclosing a translation of his German testimony in which Metzner describes his life, as well as the crimes he committed during the war in occupied eastern Europe.



Verne F. Hotzfield, CAPT. DC, Special Branch Offices, SS Siskind, US CIV. WDE, OMG U.S. Chief, Inspector for Bavaria Alfred Strauss, US CIV. WDE CI officer, interrogated Metzner.

This is a certified true copy.

Interrogation protocol CV: “I, Alfred Metzner, born on the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1895 in Kiev, by profession interpreter, after being sworn in, confirm that the following information is true and was submitted without any pressure or duress and neither by any promises.

“From 1895 to 1914, I lived in Kiev at Protetsky Street number three.

“Education: From 1901 to 1905, I attended the public school in Kiev. From 1905 to 1911 I attended high school. In 1911, I came to the Wurgler Company as an apprentice and later on I worked there as a bookkeeper until 1914. From 1915 to 1918, I was interned as a German civilian by the Russian Malkiev.

“Military service: From the fourth of June 1919, I served in the navy and my job was as an interpreter.

“Employment history: From 1919 to 1931, I lived in Berlin. From 1919-1923, I went about various tasks. 1923-1925 I was a gardener in the city of Berlin in the Charlottenburg area. 1925- 1927 I was at Company ‘Kreguesala’, and I was employed as a worker and later as a mechanic. 1927-1933 I was employed as a chauffeur of a taxi by the Jew Kronthal in Berlin. In 1933, I was working at an employment office in Berlin as a counter clerk and then returned. From 1933-1934, the national registry of health for the society of Berlin employed me in Charlottenburg. 1935 to 1936 I was working in a shoe factory. I worked in the company, which employed French civilian workers, where I acted as a foreman.

“In 1923, I married Wilhemina Guske. She bore a child in 1924, my daughter Neilly. My first wife died in 1925. In 1927, I did marry a Margaret Zolanfield. I had to leave her because she was half Jewish. Margaret Zolanfield bore me a son Wolf Metzner.

“My party membership: I was a member of the Nazi party from 1933-1935. In 1935, I had to leave the party because my wife was half Jewish. In 1941, I was called to serve on the staff in Rosenberg and attached to the district commissioner of Slonim region. Besides this, I was also a driver. I stayed there from July 1941 to the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1943. Initially, I was employed as a driver by Gerhard Erren, the





district commissioner of the region of Slonim. At the same time, I was also active as an interpreter, as well as a companion to him.

“Later on, I also got a task as an administrator in the staff of the commissioner. My salary was 400 hundred marks a month gross. I was later in charge of the shops in the city of Slonim. In 1942 I started the isolation of the Jews in our headquarters. Finally, I was attached to the Einsatzstab (the arms of the ‘action’ units). The orders came from Berlin and the execution of it was left to the discretion of the commissioner of the district.

“In July of 1942, the first destruction of the Jews in Slonim took place and the number of people killed was about 4,000. The destruction and annihilation and transportation was carried out by the local police, which means that the group of guards had been organized and then groups of 30 to 40 people were put on a truck and the local police brought them to the prepared mass graves. The moving out of the victims had to be swift because the mass execution had to be carried out during one day. Then the local police with sticks and rifle butts beat the Jews. This first annihilation of the Jews from Slonim took place in a small forest not far from the city. There were prepared graves four meters wide. I was, at this time, active as a third or fourth driver of the truck that came to the destruction place. As we arrived, the Jews were stripped, dragged and thrown into the mass graves. I did not participate in the executions, which were carried out by volunteers and SS crews. The leader of the executioners was SS Lieutenant Amelung. The participants were supplied very generously with cigarettes and alcohol so that we could carry out our action in an orderly fashion. At this first time, I did not participate in the execution; however, I was very active in transporting the people to the destruction place and during this day I apparently made about 10 or 20 trips. Each time I got 30 or 40 Jews on my truck, which I brought to the execution place. Following this, nobody was ever concerned if there were still people alive among the dead ones in the graves. Before the execution, men and women had to undress and the clothing and the valuables were collected and turned over to the district commissioner, who in turn, had the obligation to send them to Minsk, the capital of White Russia where the commissioner for the entire province took possession of them. Following the executions, Jewish men were brought from the ghetto and had to close the graves. The very drunk executioners had left many victims just wounded. These individuals, who were only wounded, dragged themselves through the neighborhood on the next day with blood streaming out of their naked bodies. Since the sight of these victims could have caused panic among the Christian population in the area, the local





police promptly murdered them. Some of the wounded that came out of the grave had been sighted and promptly shot summarily. Because of this murderous action, the boss of the district, Erren, was called the 'bloody commissioner of the district.'

"During this first execution, I did not shoot anybody. I was only a member of the accompanying team as a truck driver and did not participate in the executions. I only loaded and unloaded people. I had also with me at this time a pistol in my hand.

"The men and women had been pushed into the graves and the children killed first and then their feet pushed into the pit. Later the Jews saw the bloody bodies of their compatriots and indeed they tried to run out; however, they were shot by the leader of the execution team and also beaten and pushed back into the graves. The remaining Jews were beaten outside of the pits and the wounded were pushed by the remaining people back into the graves. Among the members of the annihilation commanders were very sadistic men who took a pleasure in shooting pregnant women in the abdomen and then throwing them into the pits. During the annihilation, the commanders and the officers were so drunk they were not able to even shoot straight. They shot four or five times to kill one person. Before the execution, the Jews had to be searched thoroughly in the rectum and genitals for jewelry and other valuables. I did not shoot during these executions. When some of the Jews refused to get off the trucks, they were beaten until they were thrown off. About 8 P.M., all of the participants in the mass murder were back at the base.

"Following this, there was a little visit with Erren the district leader, to discuss the happenings of the day. During these discussions, many of the participants were praised and the other ones who were weaker were criticized with the recommendation that they improve their performance. The following were present. (We are skipping the names here.) At the conclusion of this meeting, there was drinking and celebration. The entire number of Jewish men, women and children who were killed was estimated between 4,000 to 8,000 on this day."

Here, Alfred Metzner in his testimony starts to enumerate the executions and destruction of Jewish people in several of the communities surrounding the city of Slonim. And in the first one here where he does not mention the name of this community he states that it was about seven to nine kilometers from the city. Metner continued:

"During the execution in this area, about 1,200 to 1,400 Jews from this ghetto were destroyed. During this action, there were groups of about 500 people taken at the time. They were walked to the



annihilation area where they were killed by the destruction commander. During this execution, I was there and participated in the shootings. The prepared pits in this place were four meters in width, five meters deep, and 150 meters in length. The execution place was outside of the community behind a small forest. Seven days before this execution, shooting exercises were conducted to make sure the surrounding population would not be able to hear the noises of the mass action.

“This execution was conducted in the following fashion: The guards went with the Jews into the pits. Then the ends of the pits were closed and the Jews went first on the edges to undress, and without any further examination, they lay down in the graves. As the fifth layer of people were lying there, the guards got out of the pits and opened fire from two sides. In this fashion, it was possible to have crossfire on the Jews.

“The first layer was comprised of about 100 to 120 people in the pit. After the first execution of those, the second layer of Jews had to lie down on the bodies of the ones who had been killed before them. The second layer of people had to be placed in such a fashion that their heads touched the feet of the people under them. Thus the pits contained five layers at least. The number of people was between 400 and 500.

“ Automatics as well as machine guns and carbines carried out the shootings, whatever the preferences of the executioners were. Before this, many of the people had just been beaten to death. It was surprising to see how the Jews went into graves and tried to console each other and made the work of the executioners easier. The executions took three to four hours and I was participating without interruption in the shootings. The only interruption was when I had to reload my carbine. It is not possible for me to state how many people I killed during the three-to four-hour shooting.

“During the unloading time of my weapon, a comrade of mine continued to shoot. During this time, we drank a lot of alcohol to increase our performance. The Jews did not resist at all. The still-living Jews in the lower layers were choked later through the oncoming upper layers. The blood streamed from above to below.

“At this time, there were not any living wounded coming out.

“The graves were closed by the surrounding population and after this mass annihilation, a conference again took place at the office of the district commissioner who praised on my performance and dedication at this occasion. He also expressed satisfaction with the entire action. In this fashion, were more of the same types of executions performed in other communities. One was Kozlowczyzna where about 700





to 800 Jews were murdered. In Dereczyn, 2,000 to 3,000 people were killed. In Holinka, 400 to 500 Jews, and in Byten, about 3,000 to 14,000 people. In these executions, all the participants of the previous ones were required to participate. We used the same weapons. Besides us, a volunteer member of the German army, a very sadistic and notorious one called by the name of Muck, also participated. Volunteering soldiers and railroad workers from Slonim noted that to participate in executions was something they could benefit from. Clothing and pieces of jewelry were also obtained at this execution. However, body searches could not be performed because of lack of time. In one of these locations, it was noted that there was in the neighborhood a Polish underground group. The members had been very sharply interrogated by the SS security service. All of these people were mistreated and shot together with the Jews. This group was composed of eight Poles from the national congress. The leader of this group was SS officer Amelung.

“During this execution, I was also present. The German police, under the leadership of a staff sergeant, rounded up the Poles and they were surrounded also by the local police and brought to the execution place and immediately shot.

“The second annihilation action in Slonim took place in the fall of 1943, and should have been the last in solving the ‘Jewish problem’ in the city.

“A similar method of the final solution was ordered in all of the neighborhood districts. The district leader or commissioner who first ‘solved this problem’ would be immediately promoted.

(I would like to remark that 85% of the population of these areas were Jewish. In one and a half years in this district there were 24.000 Jews destroyed.)

“ There was a fire in the Slonim Ghetto in the late fall of 1943. In this extermination action, 10,000 Jews were killed. The local police and SS secured the ghetto the night before this action. The city military commander provided troops to protect the attackers against the underground army.

“At 4 A.M., the Latvians and the local police surrounded the ghetto. All the Jews, who tried to run away from the ghetto, were immediately killed by machine-gun fire. Some Jews in the Ghetto tried to dig under the fences to get out or to hide in shelters.

“The few individuals who succeeded in getting out had been turned in by the local population to the Germans and their collaborators, and were summarily shot.

“The destruction of the Jews took place in the following fashion: When some of the Jews did not follow the order to leave their houses, they were burned alive or beaten out of their dwellings, or they were



shot in their houses. Some sadistic executioners began shooting the Jews with light bullets, which created tremendous wounds.

“To secure more success of this action, machine guns were placed around the ghetto. The Jews were not led to any place. They were shot on the streets or in their houses. During the night before, many Jewish women were raped and otherwise abused and mistreated by the local police, and then shot.

“Many of the police tried to outperform each other and they bragged how many women they abused. Later, groups of executioners entered the ghetto. I went there with Muck and the local police, and I was the leader of one of these troops. In this action, an attempt was made to get hidden survivors out with flamethrowers as well as carbine butts. When this method did not succeed, fire flares were used, thrown in the houses and after a short time, an entire quarter of the city was burning. The collapsing burning houses suffocated Jews, who were hiding in cellars or dugouts.

“Dead bodies as well as wounded people were doused with benzene or gasoline and burned. Hand grenades were also thrown into the houses. I also tossed grenades and besides that I used my weapon to continue shooting. The Jews did not resist. I myself was in the ghetto from 7 A.M. to 10 P.M. At 10 P.M., the entire action was finished. In most of the houses, about 60 to 70 people perished due to tossed hand grenades. I did notice that the Jews went to their death praying and trying to console each other. During this action, two Jewish men tried to take cover in a nearby river by swimming. Muck and myself started to shoot at them and after a while, we did not see them above the water. During this action, I was covered with blood.

“In the evening, there was again the usual meeting with compliments and comments by the district leader Erren. At this point, the annihilation of the Jews was celebrated with a lot of drinks. I was again commended for my daily action.

“In the city of Slonim, one of our comrades from the German police by the name of Schultz had a Jewish girlfriend. This irked the commissioner. Schultz was transferred as a punishment and his Jewish girlfriend, while he was away, was shot to death.

“Generally good-looking Jewish girls tried to save their lives by offering themselves to the Germans. I had a Russian girlfriend. I employed her as a housekeeper.

“The district commissioner Erren was never present at the executions. However, he ordered them and worked out the plans. Usually before the extermination actions, he used to demand from the Judenrat,





which was a council created by the Germans all over the occupied territories, that it should deliver valuables to him. They were later on distributed in German cities.

“Beforehand, they also distributed valuables among the participants in the execution. The district commissioner issued an order: ‘Whoever enriches himself by taking the Jewish valuables shall be executed.’ However, he enriched himself very considerably.”

Section seven of the testimony deals in reporting on the happenings in the ghetto of Baronowicze. Baranowicze is one of the bigger cities in Western White Russia. Between the wars it belonged to Poland and later to Soviet White Russia. Metzner continued: “We were spreading out in Baranowicze; there were 12,000 people in the ghetto. The extermination of these Jewish people took place during the morning hours. The ghetto was normally first surrounded. In the beginning, about 100 Jews in each group were brought to the place and destroyed with the old- established methods and styles. Afterwards, if the inhabitants of the houses of the Ghetto refused to come out, various German troops and teams murdered them as it was described in the previous communities.

“I was there myself on one team of three Germans together with 17 to 20 local police who were under our command. The destruction took place along the streets. The drunken executioners beat and murdered children under the eyes of their parents. Lying-around bodies were buried by the local population in a very sloppy way, so that dogs later dug out parts of the bodies. The usual looting by the participants followed.

“My team destroyed between 1,200 and 1,500 Jews on this day. Many uncounted bodies remained under the collapsed houses.”

Chapter eight of the testimony is refers to the happenings in the fall of 1943 in the eastern White Russian city of Nowogrodek. “The local SS district commissar,” Metzner went on, “ordered this extermination action that led to the complete destruction of the entire Jewish community. This action was committed by the SS’s own special commanders, who committed this from idealism, and without any alcohol. I was not participating in these happenings.

The district commissioner of Slonim, Erren, used to say: ‘Its better to kill 100 Jews than to let one escape alive.’ In the Ghetto in Baranowicze, I id kill between 100 and 150 people. The total count is unknown. The form and style of these executions was exactly like in Slonim. This form was the general style of work.





“I could not say that we lived in style. However, we had enough food and other items brought by peasants from around the section voluntarily. Three people from the Jewish council brought to Erren the demanded objects and were immediately killed, since Erren did not want to have any witnesses to his stealing. I also followed up on his machinations with money exchange and, of course, the commissioner realized that I knew too much. I was promptly transferred to Berlin in December 1943. However, he assisted in helping to transfer my girlfriend to Germany. From June 1944 until the Americans came in, I was working as a manager of travel matters of a foreign group of artists. The ministry of propaganda organized this group. I brought them to Augsburg where I lived until now and sustained myself from my savings, as well as all kinds of dealings in food products.

“In my view, I did participate in these mass actions because I thought that a human life is worthless. I had to do my part in these actions; otherwise, maybe I would have been shot myself.

“These statements that I have signed between pages one and seven, as well as this statement here, was without any pressure or without promises to me, and to my best knowledge, encompasses everything without withholding anything.”

Signed

Alfred Metzner.

Signed: Verve F. Hotzfield,

Capt. DC

Special Branch Officer

Signed: S.S. Siskind,

US Civ. WDE

OMG US chief inspector of Bavaria

Signed: Alfred Strauss

Alfred Strauss

US Civ. WDE Ci Officer

XII. Interrogated by:

Signed: Alfred Strauss



Alfred Strauss

US Civ. WDE Ci Officer

A certified true copy

A general rule of practice by the Nazis and their helpers was that the people who been brought to the pits and graves were ordered to undress. Since some of the graves were not able to absorb so many corpses, it was then practical to take the additional load in the form of clothing. Sometimes they searched the clothing, but it usually did not yield too much in valuables. There are many testimonies from people who survived and who watched the carnage. The screams of horror and agony were unbelievable. Many who refused to get into the trucks or were unable to walk were shot in their houses in beds or shelters.

Next day they attacked all the area outside of the ghetto. All houses in and out of the ghetto were searched repeatedly, at which time some remaining victims were murdered.

People who were not found escaped to the woods, according to the testimony of the lady survivor of Dereczyn, who ran to the forest and survived. Her father refused to go with her. On Sunday the 26<sup>th</sup> of July, a man was walking on the street holding under his arm a loaf of bread and was going apparently to visit a sick neighbor. The policeman met him. He was Polish and brought up since childhood among Jews; his name was Albin. Before the war, he worked for many years in a mill run by the Jews. He was very, very cruel and basically shot anybody with whom he'd had contact before. He asked this old Jewish man Mr. Bialostocki, "Where are you going?" He answered: "I'm bringing some food to a friend who is hungry and weak." Without any word, Albin shot him. It is unlikely that any psychologist or psychiatrist and other professional expert on the human mind and brain function will be able to explain the anger or the cruelty of this kind of hate. This is another of many confirmations that power corrupts and motivates humans at any level of intelligence and education.

There have been instances in Dereczyn and elsewhere, when some of the local poor neighbors children had been practically brought up by Jewish people, and yet when they grew up to become auxiliary policemen, without hesitation they killed their former benefactors.





By interviewing surviving partisans from Dereczyn, we could not establish very exact figures on how many people ran to the forests to join the various partisans groups. But the consensus is that it was about 300 to 350 people, including some elderly, children and teenagers.

My father Josel Eilender, my mother Sarah, and sister Ester, who was at this time 12 years old, were among escapees in the forest. It is still not clear to me how they made it. After the war, I asked my father's deputy Mr. Furmanski if he had any information about it. He did not. According to Mr. Furmanski, my father was put in charge of family camp in the forest, which contained women, children and the elderly. His role was to see that they had some food, clothing, shelter, and some kind of protection. As time went on, Soviet drops of food and ammunition, as well as newspapers, started to appear in the underground camps. On occasion, some parachutists used to come and they were very fond of my father. It was inescapable that some German military personnel, mostly police, were taken prisoners. It was not possible to let them go, since they would immediately bring an entire SS division into the forests, and the partisans location would be known. Therefore, the underground people executed them. My father, who spoke German and Russian fluently, used to act as an interpreter. Sometimes he was asked by the captured gendarmes, "Do you have an order from Moscow to kill us?" His answer was, "Not at all, only our hearts tell us to shoot into the uniform you are wearing."

Around Christmas time 1942 a large German force supported by local police, as well as some of the friendly farmers, who were intelligence sources, surrounded the forest and started an offensive. The partisans had no choice but to leave their pretty well organized quarters, dugouts and other establishments in the forest, and move to different areas. There was snow, frost and it was very cold. They did not have proper equipment to establish better shelters and deeper dugouts. My little sister Ester froze her legs and she could not walk. My father carried her as much as he could. Apparently, she died of exposure to cold and hunger. My father, according to the testimony of people who been with him around March 1942, froze to death in the new shallow dugout. My mother subsequently died of hunger. My father used to take out my picture and said to his comrades: "Well, my heart tells me that he is alive". He was right. My younger brother Gerszon kept his promise that he would never be taken to the pits in Dereczyn. During the liquidation of the Ghetto in Dereczyn he was one of many selected to be killed at the prepared graves. He jumped from a truck and was shot. I will forever share the anguish of my family on horrible days.



During my captivity, I always heard some older people saying that a human being is much stronger than a horse or an elephant. What we were enduring and surviving for so long could not be explained otherwise since an animal would have succumbed already. The ones who could escape the massacre of the ghettos, in this case Dereczyn, were the “lucky” ones. Their suffering in the forest in the winter in existing snow and rain in the dugouts, always hungry and also hunted like animals by the Germans or local police was horrifying. They were tortured and killed if captured. It was also horrifying to see children and parents or comrades dying from wounds, which could not be treated, in addition to infections and starvation. It was hell everywhere. Some young people said it was not worth it, and committed suicide.

However, the partisans had proven that one can get used to anything-even hell. They still preferred to die fighting the enemy and avenging their love ones who perished in a horrible fashion.

A physician from Suwalki, Dr. Rosenthal, who lived with his family in Dereczyn, was offered to be spared working as a physician in the ghetto. He refused and went with his wife into the pit! He left a teenage boy, who was able to escape to the forest. He became a famous machine gunner and died in battle. The great help to the underground army was a lush forestry, which surrounded the entire area. Life started to become more stabilized. They organized so-called sick bays without too much medical help. Family camps were established, food was fetched from the surrounding villages and farmers. When the escapees arrived in the forest, it was summer; however, as fall and winter moved in, it was a different story. It was more difficult to get shelter from the elements, food was getting scarce, and people became sicker. However, the worst was yet to come.

A 17-year-old girl from Dereczyn by the name of Gerda, who today is an elderly lady and a grandmother, lives in West Palm Beach. I visited her recently and she told me that during the offensive on the edge of the forest full of snow, a former classmate of hers from junior high, who was dancing with her at their prom, became a Nazi auxiliary policeman. In her presence, he shot her mother and father and two little siblings. She asked him: “How can you do this to my family in front of me when we knew each other, and are from the same city and school?” He said: “You have to die because you are Jewish.” He shot at her with a submachine gun and missed; she fell but was not injured since the bullets flew over her head. This is just an example of how the non-Jewish neighbors, some classmates, some coworkers and some friends, participated in the Holocaust even though they had a common enemy.





According to Gerda's recollection three or four weeks after the extermination of the inhabitants of the Dereczyn Ghetto, a group of Jewish partisans, along with gentile comrades, decided to attack Dereczyn. The attack was a total surprise to the local police and the few Germans who were there. A bitter battle raged in the city. Two Germans and 45-50 auxiliary local policemen were killed. Among those killed was the dancer with Gerda at the prom. The assault was not only a success as a revenge for the atrocities, but also a booster to the morale. A great deal of ammunition, weapons and food was captured. It was a big help to the poorly supplied and armed partisans. The Nazis were made to believe that a large force was in the forest and for several weeks they did not dare to go back to the city. The attackers did burn most of the town. A few died and several were wounded. Naturally, following these episodes, strong forces were employed in the entire region and the attacks on the guerrillas continued. The underground army was rapidly increasing in numbers, got better arms, equipment and had contact by radio with the Soviet high command. Out of 300-350 people from Dereczyn who initially joined the partisan movement, only 60-65 survived.

The young men who had been liberated from the forests by advancing Soviet forces were immediately mobilized into the regular army and most of them died in the battles around and in the city of Bialystok during the liberation of Poland. Naturally, this is a very tragic postscript to the horrible ordeal of these people. After the war the women partisans had been given some medals and certificates of participation in the fight for the motherland, and they could go anywhere they wished. Sadly and tragically, they had no place to go. To go back to the cities where they were born, raised and went to school after they lost all their love ones would have been a big trauma.

After the liquidation of the Ghetto in Dereczyn, Fritz Figas, the Barber from Goerlitz, who played Genghis Khan, was then sent to fight the underground army around Baranowicze. The people he was supposed to murder killed him there. What happened to the Polizeimeister and the rest, I personally have no idea. It should be mentioned that during the carnage in Dereczyn in July of 1942, Fritz shot the Jewish girlfriend of his superior Sibilla and Sibilla shot Fritz' girlfriend. What a "wonderful kindness". If Adolph, the painter, had known what Fritz the barber did, he would have punished him for violation of the racial purity laws of Nuremberg of September 1935.





In May 1942, the council of the Ghetto of Slonim was ordered to send out letters demanding that 800 young people should come to a designated area of the city with food for three days in order to be shipped out to work in occupied Soviet White Russia. Since less than demanded number of young males did appear at the designated time, the German SS, together with the local police, surrounded the ghetto and started a manhunt in order to increase the number of people needed for the transport. The search was intense and brutal and took place house to house with beatings and abuses. At this point, I ran out of the ghetto and hid in the machine shop where I used to work part-time. I was not surprised to find it closed, since at this point, practically the entire city was under siege; however, with more scouting, I found an open window through which I entered the shop. I found three men hiding there already. When they saw me, they warned me that this place was also very dangerous; however, if I wanted to stay, I was welcome.

As the time passed by, it was depressing that although we had been outside of the ghetto in the so-called Aryan sections of the city, there was still increasing noise, screams and even shootings. Up to this day, it's hard to understand that I remained calm and collected. I found a book among others lying around in the attic and started to read it. It was a little historical book written in Yiddish, "The Ten Days That Shocked the World." It was about the Bolshevik revolution in Russia. I sat quietly and continued to read in spite of the fact that the noise and shootings outside started to increase. There were already a lot of murders, since some people resisted being sent to so-called work camps in view of bitter past experiences and lies by the Nazis ending in mass executions of the potential workers.

Finally, the other inmates said, "Let's get out of here since it's getting hot around us." So I left the shop and climbed to the attic. I took off the yellow patch from the front and back of my jacket. As I peeked through the small window, I saw German soldiers, German military police, as well as the auxiliary police and some Russian Army defectors wearing their uniforms, pushing and beating people, and gun shots ringing out constantly. These Russian soldiers defected to the Germans and very willingly helped them to murder not only Jews but also their own fellow citizens, Russian prisoners of war. While I was observing through the small window what was going on in the streets, I saw a lot of local gentile people standing and cheering while the Jews were being rounded up and beaten. Apparently, one of them, a stocky, young, short-size boy saw me and started to scream, "Jew! Jew! Jew!" This was not enough for him; he ran up to the attic to get me. I confronted him and I thought before I die, I would kill him too. I started to choke him when two former Russian soldiers with rifles, who had joined the new regime, came up to the attic. One of



them shouted to me, "Who are you? Are you a Jew?" I said, "No" in Russian, since I spoke the language fluently. He said, "OK. We will take you for interrogation to our superior." The other soldier was taking the boy down from the attic ahead of us and went out. The soldier, who spoke to me said, "Come after me" while going down the steep stairs. As I saw him heading down, I reached a landing where a big piece of iron was lying; by reflex, I grabbed this iron and hit him over the head. He fell down and apparently was killed. Having no other choice as to where to go, I immediately ran out into the street where I was picked up by a group of Russian soldiers. They ordered me to lie flat on the sidewalk. After a half an hour, I was picked up by a former Soviet soldier with a gun in his hand and he said, "Follow me." We passed by a cemetery where many executions took place. I thought, "If he takes me there, I will try to kill him if I can." However, he just took me to a truck. There were many others and we were driven to the railroad station. Naturally, the oppressors did not know what I did at the attic and later when they found out, they shot 15 Jews in the street as revenge. The scene at the railroad station was horrible. About 400 young men had been sitting on their knapsacks on the ground and they had been heavily guarded. Behind the fence there were family members: parents, wives, sisters who were petrified, very worried and many of them crying since they knew that whoever the Nazis took away, never came back alive. They were there to say their last good-byes. It did not matter that many of them were still laborers and had worked for some other companies supervised by the Germans to help with the war efforts. However, there was intense competition among the directors of these companies for cheap slave labor. There were cases where some of the managers of the shops and factories evacuated their Jewish workers a day before the action in order to prevent them from being captured and sent out. This was not because of good-hearted intentions, it was only because they'd been busy running factories and other important enterprises, and this kept them out of going into the front lines. Since I was captured outside of the ghetto, I didn't have any food with me. There had been some kind of exchanges and negotiations, and a number of guarded men had been taken back into the ghetto to perform more skilled labor. Finally, the commotion had subsided. We had been ready to board the cattle trains when one of the young prisoners got up to wave good bye to his family. Whereupon, one of the Germans shot him dead. The killer happened to be in charge of the labor office of the commandant's bureau of the region of Slonim.

After the war, the killer was arrested by the American authorities and was to be turned over to the Polish authorities for extradition and trial for war crimes. I was called as a witness and testified about this





murder. At this time, I was a medical student at Munich University. One time a very nicely dressed gentleman came with a young and good-looking woman and asked my landlady if he could speak to me. Naturally, I met these people. The elderly gentleman introduced himself as the father of the arrested killer and the lady was his daughter-in-law of six months. He said that the mother of his son wished me to rescind my testimony since his other son had already died on the eastern front. He went on to say that it was unbelievable that his son Karl could commit such a crime. He also offered me everything he owned to change my testimony.

My reply was polite but clear. I did tell him that I thought many German people were hardworking, intelligent, smart, and they most likely would not do what his son had done. However, as much as a ordinary German may have some humanity and understanding, Germans in their military uniforms in the east and also in the west had been a bunch of murderers. I also said: "How do you expect me to react when my father, mother, sister and brother are buried somewhere in the forest of Western White Russia, victims of this horrible genocide? Thus, you are talking to the wrong man." The son was extradited to Poland. He was tried and executed. It also came out later, which I did not know at that time, that the son Karl did participate in the mass shootings in the surrounding little towns.

Finally toward evening we had been put in the cattle wagons holding about 60 to 70 people and had been traveling for three days and three nights, not knowing where we were heading, and what was going to happen to us the next minute or the next hour.

We finally stopped at a very large railroad junction center in the city of Orsha. This was in Soviet White Russia. A few German gendarmes and White Russian auxiliary police were guarding us. We stood there for a long time, the guards had been drinking, singing and talking. We found out that we had to stand there to make a detour to the city of Mogilev. Evidently going straight would be dangerous in view of the partisans.

Mogilev was situated on the river Dnieper with a big segment of industry. It had a large Jewish population. During the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, it fought for over three weeks until it was captured. As we left the train, we noted a group of German-speaking Jews working at the station and some of us told them: "Run toward the forest, because you are going to be murdered." The answer was: "The Fuhrer (leader) will not do such a thing." One of our co-prisoners asked the local policeman: "Where are



you taking us?" The answer was: "We are taking you to a place where you will live for a while but you will not have any desire to make love."

The Mogilev camp to which we were brought was small. Previously it had been a factory for airplane parts named after Dimitrov, which apparently was bombed out by the German air force. It had guards with machine guns in the turrets at the corners of the fences. We had been ordered to sit on the ground and wait to be processed. In the meantime, we watched the inmates. Many of them had Semitic faces; however, they did not say one single word to us. Their heads had been shaven and they wore civilian clothing. By sitting on the ground, I had a dilemma since I had in my pocket the graduation certificate from the high school that I received on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 1941. As I mention previously I hid this diploma in cellar in Slonim. When I changed my living location, I risked my life in order to dig it out from the hiding place. From that time on, I always carried it with me. If I kept it, the Germans would find it and they would kill me, since they did not like any educated people. If I destroyed it and survived, I might need it to prove that I had a high school diploma.

I spoke to one of the prisoners sitting near me and he said: "Idiot, you will never survive, so destroy it." I did with tremendous trepidation and sorrow even though I was facing death any minute. Finally, my turn came and I was brought into a barrack. It was not too big with a long table with four SS men whose guns were on the table in front of them. There was also a higher-ranking officer standing in this location. All of us carried a special ID card with a picture and on it was written Jude (Jew). When the officer who questioned me asked about my profession, I answered soapmaker.

As events developed later, this saved my life, thanks to God, as well as my father. He was not only a brilliant man in business, but he showed me how to be very resourceful and smart in adverse conditions. At the time when we have been together, my family, as well as others, were facing starvation. My father got a bright idea to produce bootleg soap. Naturally, this was very dangerous to the peasants and the people who profited from it. However, people risked their lives produce soap at home, which was at that time a very precious and rare commodity. He was getting some fat from slaughtered cattle. This was not allowed and punishable by the death penalty. All the cattle had to be registered by the Germans and not only secretly used cattle but also pigs and sold them on the black market. The Jews in the ghetto got some of the meat fat from the peasants. Father used to get some of the fat to produce soap. We carried this operation on during





the night and sold it among inhabitants of the ghetto, as well as to some of the peasants whom we trusted. To make soap, one needs not only fat but also a chemical, sodium hydroxide. Of course, where do you get this product in Dereczyn in those days? My father remembered that somewhere in Slonim somebody stored this crucial product. The Jews had been confined. Traveling to Slonim, the mother ghetto, about 20 miles away, was like landing on the moon. Yet he risked his life. One of the German gendarmes of Dereczyn, an elderly individual, had a Jewish mistress (in violation of the Aryan purity law of Nuerenberg 1935). She was a neighbor, a very nice person who got my father a travel permit. Thus the sodium hydroxide arrived. Naturally, the soap was not Palmolive. Sometimes we made some further deals. That was how we survived this very difficult period.

While I was being questioned, I noted behind me the commandant of this camp. He was a tall, heavysset Austrian with bluish, watery eyes who had the SS rank of Obersturmfuhrer, which is comparable to the rank of first lieutenant. He also was a major of the police in his country. During my incarceration, he was addressed as Oberst-colonel. Possibly in the meantime he was promoted.

When he heard that I was a soapmaker, he said: "We may need him later" and ordered that I should join the selected group of skilled workers, which at the final count was about 60. The rest of the group of 403 prisoners originally brought from Slonim Ghetto had been subjected to hard labor by digging and cleaning debris in the front of the headquarters of the SS. They had been beaten, abused and starved.

Among the group of skilled workers were carpenters, tailors, shoemakers, mechanics, electricians, locksmiths, as well as one single watchmaker and the soapmaker. Following the registration and selection of workers according to their skills, a selected SS man led us to a large yard full of long iron rods.

The commandant came out and ordered that every prisoner should grab a rod and run with it. Naturally, if you have over 400 people running with rods, many get entangled, many fall, and at this point, they were beaten by SS guards. However it is interesting what kind of memory the commandant of the camp had. After a while, he said: "Tailor masters and shoemakers sit down," and finally I heard him say, "Soapmaker sit down." The rest of the workers continued to run until they were exhausted and bloodied.

Following the iron rod reception, we were taken to a large hall where we were stripped of our clothing and all our hair shaven. Our vestments were put in the special steam sterilizer. The so-called device





was composed of a barrel where you put in clothing and some hot steam that went through it. It did not seem to do anything for sterility, except when it came out it was half wet and smelling.

It was not clear to me how long this small camp was in existence. The inmates consisted of several groups. One group was young Russian prisoners of war from the first proletarian division from Moscow. They were inexperienced. Another group was composed of White Russians. They were suspected of being sympathizers of members of the underground army. The third group consisted of some Jews who had been skilled workers and citizens of the city of Mogilev. When we came, there were already shops where some prisoners worked and newcomers were able to join them and work in many of these shops.

It was of interest to me that in this camp there was already a skilled bona fide soapmaker with two coworkers. He was a Jew, a native of Frankfurt, Germany and his name was Lipa Rosenthal. He did escape early enough and got to Mogilev, where he worked in his profession till he was taken prisoner. His two assistants didn't know anything about soapmaking. One of them was an important Communist Party member in the city of Mogilev and he found kind of a refuge in this soapmaking establishment. The operation was primitive and confined to one room. There the fat, which was to be used, came from slaughtered cattle.

Mr. Rosenthal spoke beautiful German. The commandant of the camp, Hubertus Koelblinger, used to come almost every day to each shop to check the workers and see what was being done and what had to be done and who should be punished. He once asked Rosenthal: "Where are you from? You speak such a beautiful German." Rosenthal said, "I am a native of Poland and I learned the language in school." The colonel said to him: "You are lying and someday you will pay for lying to a German officer."

I was brought to the shop by an SS noncom and introduced to the boss as another soapmaker. Mr. Rosenthal got pale and his chin drooped. He did not want to have any competition. He looked at me in disbelief and said to me: "You are a young fellow, how could you be a soapmaker. You are a nobody." He said to the noncom that he did not need me. The noncom told him to shut up since the commandant had ordered me to be there. I had read once that in old-fashioned soap factories, which were rather primitive, the master used to put in the chemical sodium hydroxide, fat and water. In order to see if there was too much of the chemical, or too much water, he put his finger in the kettle and then put it on his tongue. If the tongue burned, it meant there was too much chemical and more water was needed. I rolled up my sleeve



and did exactly that with my finger. This changed the situation, and I was accepted as a member of the soap crew.

In the beginning, life was beautiful. We had a nice, clean room with three beds for three people. We had enough food because the kitchen was around the corner and for two pieces of soap, the Russian war prisoners, who had been cooks, brought us everything we needed. It was as unbelievable as it sounded. On top of that, we had been organized by a transient SS unit from Alzace into two soccer teams: shoemakers against tailors. The transient unit loved the games. I played with the tailors.

My boss, however, had another assignment. He was an assistant to the "doctor" who usually came once a week for inspection. The camp "physician" was actually by profession a plumber from Breslau, Silesia. He used to check every face during the general lineup each Sunday. Whoever did not look right, whether pale, haggard or malnourished, was taken out and shot the same day.

My boss Herr Lipa Rosenthal, as an assistant to the selection, used to compile a list during the week, whenever he noted that some of the prisoners did not perform well or looked weak and tired. They would be included in the executions according to the list. All of these poor souls were judged not capable or needed to continue in the German war effort. Sometimes those selected to die were graciously allowed to live another night, and in the morning the trucks took them to the execution place. I used to observe how they ate the last bread ration with the tremendous appetite of starved people.

I also speculated that our oppressors gave these victims the last ration of bread to divert their attention from the imminent arrival of the final solution. Many of these people used to sit quietly in the trucks knowing where they were going and eating their last bite of bread.

Later on as a physician, I used to analyze this moment and came to the conclusion that the feeling of hunger is much stronger than the fear of death.

As was previously mentioned, we had a large group of Russians, mostly prisoners of war, as well as people who were suspected of being sympathizers of the partisans or being a member of them. They were sent out every day for long hours of hard labor, which included the cleaning up of the debris after the fighting, as well as demolishing the wooden houses of the city. The wood was used to heat up all the German installations in the winter: barracks and headquarters and so forth. They did not care that they were





destroying maybe thousands of dwellings and houses. As long as it served their purpose, that was all that mattered.

The wood from the houses was then brought to a very huge hall in our camp where there had been a number of circular electric saws run by Russian prisoners or collaborators or auxiliary police who had been brought in as a punishment for some infractions. In charge of this operation was a Russian Jew whose name was Simon. He was short, elderly and very tough, especially rough to the former Russian collaborators whom he put in the worst conditions, and also many times had the Germans take them away or possibly execute them. The wood was then cut further to the size, that would fit into ovens and other small heating equipment.

The war went on and so did business as usual in our camp. The shops had been performing under strict control of the Germans as well as the foreman. However, the group of the nonskilled workers, who came with me from the city of Slonim in May 29<sup>th</sup> 1942, were doing very poorly. They were dwindling rapidly under the conditions of starvation, beatings and selections on Sundays by the plumber doctor and others. In October of 1942, only eight people remained. Finally, they were told to pick up their clothing, which was a bunch of miserable rags, and go for a bath. They never returned because the bath was a blood bath. They had been killed at the local cemetery where most of their fellow prisoners preceded them.

The only remaining people from our group were those working in the different facilities and shops. I continued to work in the soapmaking factory. However, the atmosphere was getting tenser since my boss apparently was concerned that if there were two soapmakers, his chances of survival might be lessened.

In the meantime, he lived like a king. He had food, many suits and many beautiful shirts, which of course, he could not wear. There had been rumors that he had some connections in the city and was selling the clothing of the killed ones and was getting vodka, cognac, etc. for it.

Among the Russian prisoners of war were individuals who looked very distinguished and probably educated. In particular there was a gentleman with gray hair, good-looking with a mustache, and the rumor among us was that he was a full colonel in the Russian army. Of course, the captors did not know about it and he worked on a tractor outside the camp during the day, and returned to the barracks at night. As it turned out later, he was the chief and organizer of an underground group in the camp of Mogilev. Later on,



while working with the tractor in the field, he did escape into the woods and joined the Russian partisans, who had been very numerous in the area. They also had connections with our group in the camp.

On one Sunday, just after the general lineup and head count, a middle-aged distinguished-looking Russian prisoner approached me and said: "I understand that you speak and read German." I said: "Yes, I do." He also added that he admired my Russian. I answered that I had graduated from a Russian high school. Then he said that he would like to talk to me, and he would see me the following Sunday. I surmised that this individual must have been an officer, and I was wondering what he would like to talk to me about. During the next meeting, he said to me that many of the German officers and noncoms came to the tailor shop frequently for different repairs and measurements, and some of their clothing was wrapped in German newspapers. The Russian prisoner said, "It is very important and interesting to scan the newspapers for all kinds of information that might include some front-line reports as well some other news. We would appreciate it if you could read it and give a briefing to one of our people." I agreed and automatically I became a part of the underground group, not knowing yet that they were planning to break out from the camp, to join their comrades in the underground in the forest of White Russia. I continued to translate the most important events from the German newspapers and relayed the information to the partisan members in the camp.

As the events turned out later, this saved my life. The danger for me was not from the Nazi side at this time, but from my boss who felt that my being an additional soapmaker minimized his chances of survival. One of us had to be killed since the Germans kept to a minimum the skilled people they needed.

The camp commandant Koelblinger used to inspect all the shops very frequently. He was accompanied by a noncom named Adams, more than six feet tall, with blue eyes, a big face and huge hands, and by a young, pale police lieutenant who hardly ever spoke, and gave the impression of being home sick and depressed. Each foreman had to stand at attention and give a report about production. Such inspections were fraught with all possible dangers, including being beaten or killed. Nobody knew what to expect from these kinds of visits.

During such inspection, my boss Lipa Rosenthal reported that there was not enough fat to produce soap, hence he did not need me anymore in the shop. This could have been a death sentence for me or some other disaster. The colonel asked Adams, who was also one of the executioners in the camp, "What are we





going to do with him?" Adams looked at me, and said: "Well, I will put him in the woodchopping hall."

This was the end of the "good times." Not only did I lose my quarters, but I was also exposed to a starvation diet as well as hard labor.

The hall was huge, usually cold and noisy. The foreman and boss of this establishment was a middle-aged, short, stocky man with a big nose and a large mouth, and at many times, nasty. Apparently, he used to be some kind of a manager of a Soviet factory. However, sometimes he did have some human traits.

As I came, he looked at me with suspicion. Then he said, "What can you do here? As a Polish Jew, you are not used to work. Most of you people are only businessmen, capitalists and no-goodniks. We Russian Jews know what hard work means, but I will let you add to the stock of chopped wood."

With the advent of the destruction of previously mentioned houses, we had been inundated by bedbugs. They were more democratic than other ones since they infiltrated not only our dirty bunks, but also the quarters of the German guards, the police and the Russian collaborators.

Following my removal from the soapmaker's quarters, the underground army arranged that I be billeted in the room with inmates who had been drivers who transported by wagons the camp food and other articles for the prisoners and guards. Some of them were professionals in this endeavor and others had to learn how to handle horses and wagons. Living with them was a very important improvement for me. In exchange for extra food, I did clean their quarters at night, and also heat some water for tea. Among them was a Russian officer who worked very hard. It was winter and very cold. It appeared that this individual was suffering from sciatica. One day after working in the cold weather, he had a particularly severe episode of it. He said to me that he was going to commit suicide, because he could not take the pain anymore. There was no medication of any kind to be had. I remembered that growing up in northern Poland my brother and I suffered from frostbites, and our toes were red, itching and painful. Our grandmother had a remedy for it, which was hot water with some urine. Urine had chemicals and the redness and itching disappeared. I told the officer if he gave me a chance, I would try to help him by using an old method. I took a large pail of water with a good amount of urine, and asked him to sit in it, if possible, twice a day. After one week, the sciatica disappeared. The man was very happy and thankful. He said: "You practically saved my life; therefore, I will include you in the secret breakout from the camp that has been planned by the underground army. We will join other fighters in the forest. You are from a different country, you came from the west, from a capitalist country, and we should not trust you, but since you are a nice fellow who helped me, I am





going to make sure that you are taken with us the moment we break out. However, you have to swear to me that this information I just divulged to you, remain with you. If you do not go with us, we will have to kill you.”

Shortly after this conversation, one of the camp inmates told me that a German police lieutenant mentioned my name, saying that he would like to see me. I was surprised, because nobody spoke to us except to command us or drill us. I thought maybe that was the one who knew my parents and connected me to the name Eilender.

A week or two later, a lieutenant by the name Tramp, a short, middle-aged man, and not too arrogant, called me and took me up the stairs where the camp’s food supply storage area was located. He gave me a loaf of bread and half of a large Swiss cheese, which was by itself, like winning the lottery. He started to question me about my qualifications as a soapmaker. I told him that I was experienced in this area. Suddenly it dawned on me that they were probably going to get rid of my former boss Lipa Rosenthal and put me in charge. I knew if this happened, Rosenthal would lose his life. A feeling of fear and remorse consumed me, and I said to the lieutenant that the only thing I did not know in soapmaking was how to make a shaving soap, hoping that they would allow Rosenthal to stay on.

Naturally, this was an unwise move on my part, which could have cost me my life. He answered me: “It is OK. Do not worry about shaving soap,” and we parted without any further comments.

I told Lipa Rosenthal about this incident. He had an uneasy feeling learning that I was questioned about my qualifications in soapmaking. It is possible that he remembered the threats made by Hubertus Kolblinger that he would someday pay dearly for lying to a German officer.

As a member of the “camp elite,” Rosenthal was meeting other heads of shops and work details for drinks or cards. Little did he know that some of them were former Soviet officers, who belonged to the under ground group. They were the people who used my translated reports from German newspapers.

Later, I found out that during one of these meetings, my former boss mentioned that he had included me in the list of prisoners to be shot the next Sunday. One of the officers remarked: “Lipa, if this happens, you will remain alive only 24 to 48 hrs thereafter. Therefore, you are being warned.” He did take me off the execution list. It was obvious that he wanted to get rid of me in the fastest and surest way. However, it did not work out for him. It certainly did for me.



Shortly before the end of my career as a soapmaker, a German police officer joined the administration of the camp. His name was Loeffel, which basically in German means a spoon. He was a middle-aged individual, heavyset with a red face. He was not a cruel one. Occasionally, he used to come into our shop and used to kind of strike me on my cheek and say: "How is the Seifenmacher?" What it means in German I really do not know even today.

Shortly after being dismissed from the soapmaking shop, we were lined up for a head count and a general assessment of the prisoner situation, including new orders, as well as instructions and the explanation of all kinds of penalties that could be enforced. This was conducted by polizeimaister Leffel. We stood lined up according to our employment and the certain shops we belonged to. I still was lined up with the soapmakers. At this point when he reached us, the police officer said to my boss: "How come I do not see this little soapmaker in your shop? What is happening?" The boss answered: "We do not have enough material and therefore he is working in the woodchopping establishment." The German looked at him with kind of an incredible gaze and said to me: "You still working there, it is so cold and so horrible. Tell me, is there anything else you could do?" I replied: "Herr Polizeimaister, I have one idea. Bedbugs inundate us here. I could try to stop the invasion by exterminating them." So he asked me: "How are you going to do it?" I said, "With a sulphuric acid sprayer. Besides this, I am going to take some burning wooden sticks, and then stuff them in between the cracks of the wooden bunks and hit the bedbugs where they live most of the time. When they start running out, I will use the sulphuric acid spray." He said, "This is a splendid idea and from now on this is going to be your job. Get out of the woodchopping shop immediately."

So I started. He provided me with everything I needed. All the prisoners watched with curiosity and approved of what I was doing. The results were pretty good. The officer was coming almost every day to check how I was doing. I used to say to him: "Herr Polizeimeister, I'm reporting two million bugs dead and four million wounded bugs." He laughed almost hysterically.

This improved my situation since I did not have to work so hard in a very cold environment, and also I was getting more food. As I proceeded with this new endeavor, I was promoted and asked to do the same in the barracks of the SS and other guards. Still, I was getting weaker and thinner. One day a load of potatoes was brought to the camp. They were stocked up in a hall with a fence.





Plolizeimeister Leffel came in. He was dressed in a clean beautiful uniform. He told me to pick up a pail and climb over the fence to take some potatoes for myself. I tried to get over the fence, but I was too weak to do it. To my surprise, the officer did it for me, filled up the pail with potatoes and carried them to my lodging. On the way, he was saying to me: "You know, I am going to talk to Hitler and Stalin to stop this horrible war."

It is interesting that despite being oppressed and isolated, there were many rumors that reached us and some of them proved to be true. For example, for some time we heard that 22 German divisions had been surrounded at Stalingrad. Of course, the underground army knew much more, because when the battle was over, I reported promptly what had happened. The guerillas in the forests knew even more because they had radio connections with Moscow and other parts of the Russian front.

The plot to break out and escape was finally implemented. Our camp had two sections: a smaller one, which contained the administrative buildings, some of which faced the street. The larger part contained the shops and the prisoner's dwellings. At each corner of this section were towers with guards. There was an inner fence between this two section. To get to the administrative section, one needed the permission of a person known to the administration and only under certain circumstances.

On Sunday the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 1943, the camp was supervised by a noncom who worked in the administrative office. He was a nice person; occasionally, he gave some cigarettes or a piece of candy to prisoners.

Apparently on Sunday the inner fence was not guarded. The advance party of conspirators walked in into the office and killed him. It is still not clear to me why they have not been able to come back for the rest of us and just they ran to the street where they were picked up by the underground people. It probably took several hours till the assassination and the escape was discovered.

In the middle of the night, the entire camp was awakened by the guards who came into each barrack with whips. They pushed us and made us line up in the camp court where usual daily lineups took place. We were surrounded by many soldiers and SS troops in battle gear, many with machine guns placed on the roofs and behind us. The commandant of the camp immediately appeared on the scene, as well as other Nazi officers. Among them was a middle-aged individual, with a little mustache and wearing a uniform of a special security officer. Such people could be seen after the war in trains and streetcars all over



Germany. They looked very harmless and polite. He happened to be the chief of the SD (security service), which usually was run by very vicious and cruel people.

He screamed to the commandant: "Let's wipe out the entire crowd of Schwines." (swains)  
We continued to stand, while they were discussing our fate. Finally, in the early morning, we were released and sent back to our barracks. The camp continued to be totally surrounded and nobody went to work for several days until the decision by several levels of command could be announced and carried out.

The punishment for the killing of the noncom was a selection of 60 prisoners who were going to be executed. Four days later on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February 1943, we were lined up according to our workplace. I stood among the soapmakers in spite of the fact that I did not work anymore in this shop. Together with us stood our boss Lipa Rosenthal as the first and the most important person. Behind him was his co-worker. The last in the row was I.

The commandant, accompanied by his entourage, was picking out from each group of skilled workers two or more persons. Finally, when the commandant came to us, he selected Lipa. At that moment, Lipa tried to get my attention to tell the selectors group that I would not be able to run the soap manufacturing without him. At this point, I knew it was me or him, and certainly I decided it was going to be him. The selected 60 people were shot at the local cemetery. Among them was Lipa Rosenthal.

Afterwards, the Polizeimeister Leffel approached me carrying a large suitcase with Rosenthal's clothing, offering it to me. I said to him: "Sir, what can I do with it? I do not need it." Then he opened my overcoat and exposed my torn shirt and he took me to the clothingwear house, and I was given warm underwear, a few shirts and a woolen Russian military overcoat. Following this, I was back in the soapmaking shop and also continued to translate the German newspapers.

As I scanned the German press, it became clear between the lines that the war was taking a downward course for the Third Reich. A rumor was spread in our camp that all the Jews in the Slonim Ghetto and the neighboring little towns were killed. This was the area where my family had perished. The rumor proved to be true.

I did not know what had happened to my family at this time. However, I realized I could not expect them to survive. The only consolation for me was that my parents, my sister and my brother were not with me, because I would not have been able to watch them being beaten, starved, tortured or killed.





According to what we heard about the front lines, it became obvious to most of us that sooner or later we would be liquidated or we would be evacuated farther to the west.

They could still need us. We only counted as useful or nonuseful individuals. Whoever was declared by the occupiers useful for the war effort or otherwise had a suspended sentence and a period of grace until sooner or later he or she joined the majority of the victims.

After the victory at Kursk, the Russian army started to move faster to the west and also appeared to endanger the Ukrainian city of Charkow, in the south of Mogilev. The order of evacuation came for only the Jewish prisoners. It was the beginning of September 1943 when we bid a tearful good-bye to the Russian coprisoners. Some of them who worked in the kitchen gave us food for the road.

We were put in cattle wagons. It was surprising and moving to see Gentile Russian wives voluntarily joining their Jewish husbands for this journey into the unknown, which actually was the road to suffering, destruction and death.

Most of the guards had been a cross section of the local population and they served as an auxiliary police force cooperating with the Germans in any of their cruel endeavors. They not only betrayed their blood-soaked fatherland and their families, but also were considered subhuman in the final analysis. They wore black uniforms with gray trimmings around the collar and on the end of the sleeves. They had been, of course, SS officers and noncoms who had been in charge of everything.

The train moved slowly and cautiously since it was already September 1943, at which time there were very large groups of well-armed partisans in the surrounding regions. After the Soviet victories at Stalingrad and Kursk, the war in the east was practically lost.

On the second day of the journey, our train suddenly was stopped, and we were ordered to get out of the cars, and while we were sitting in the field on the ground, another train going east passed by and also stopped. Some of the workers from the other train, who had been going from Poland toward the front as forced laborers to help out with many chores, told us that there was a campaign to destroy all the Jews of the occupied territories in Europe, especially in Poland. They said the people were killed by gassing. This was a surprise to me and to other prisoners, although we knew that Nazis were shooting most of the Jewish inhabitants of all the communities. However, we had never heard about other method, of the mass destruction.





According to present historical data, Hitler and his cohorts did establish 250 concentration camps and annihilation facilities all over occupied Europe. Some of them were very notorious like Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Tremblinka, Matchausen, Gros-Rosen, Dahau, Bergen-Belzen, just to mention a few and many of them were smaller and not so notorious.

We had been ordered back into the cattle cars and were on the way till we reached the very important and large railroad junction of the city of Orsha. We stayed here overnight. As the SS officers and other guards went into town to have some fun, we stayed with the auxiliary Slavic guards. They opened the doors of the cars and they were standing with their weapons on the ground. I was lying on the floor of the car at the wall facing the open door, when one of the Jewish prisoners screamed. The guard walked into the car, approached me asking, "Why did you scream?" I said, "I did not." He ordered me out of the car. I did not answer and did not move. I was surprised that he did not kill me. However, it seems to me, that if I had gotten out of the train, he would have shot me under the pretense that I wanted to escape. It was known that the Germans always reprimanded the auxiliary police if they beat or killed some of the prisoners without orders or permission. This was probably a reason why the guard did not make any more commotion, being afraid of a reprimand.

Well, this was a close call for me. It was the middle of the night when the SS leadership returned from the city and we had been on our way west early in the morning. As we arrived at the railroad station of the city of Minsk, the capital of Soviet White Russia, we were ordered to detrain and were transported to a camp at the outskirts of the city. We remained there for about a week or 10 days without a warning as to what our future fate would be. I met there a granddaughter of one of the rabbis from Suwalki. Her name was Altman. She worked there in an office. I asked her what happened to her family? She said that everybody had perished. She gave me a loaf of bread, which I shared with one of the inmates. We were on the way again toward the Polish Border, arriving at the station of Lublin. "The reception committee" was composed of tough and rough Estonian SS guards. They brought us to the very notorious concentration camp of Majdanek. The camp was located about one and a quarter miles south of Lublin. Originally, the SS established it as a prison for prisoners of war composed of the Polish intelligence and political leaders, as well as Polish Jews and Soviet prisoners of war.



The Jews had been arriving from Slovakia, Holland, Belgium, France and Greece later. This concentration camp gradually progressed to become a very notorious “five-star”extermination facility. One section of the camp had two gas chambers where cyclone B gas was used as in Auschwitz. The killing process was accomplished by mass shootings of Jews and Soviet prisoners of war. On July 24, 1944, Majdanek was liberated by Soviet troops who found only 700 survivors.

As I arrived there, I observed that the demeanor and behavior of SS guards and officers was strange, aggressive and hostile. The thousands of people were milling around or had been led in work details. I thought that Mogilev was a “resort place” compared to this. A feeling of fear, uncertainty about the future and surviving engulfed me.

Our group was led to the area between the barracks, and the selection of inmates according to their skills started. They called out shoemakers to the left, tailors to the right, carpenters, mechanics and several other vocations to which I could not have claimed to belong. Suddenly, they called out the bricklayers. Well, at this point, I joined this group thinking that maybe I just could put one brick on the other and be a useful prisoner. After standing with them surrounded already by SS guards, something suddenly struck me, which I cannot explain or understand even today: why I slipped out of this group and went back to the unassigned prisoners. Shortly after came the announcement of saddlemakers, which means in German, Satler, people who work with leather. I had stepped out and maybe 20 other prisoners joined me. Within two hours my group and some other skilled workers with my former inmates from the east had been led away under a heavy guard. As we were nearing the gate, a semistarved, half-naked woman stretched out her arms and screamed, “You are going to live!” I did not realize that I was leaving one of the most cruel and dangerous places in the world.

We were put back on a train, direction unknown to us. As we arrived at a new destination, I remembered the date: It was September 17<sup>th</sup>, 1943. I do not remember how long this trip took. During this journey, I fainted, because I was thirsty and possibly dehydrated. My only recollection was seeing the long train on the other side of the tracks with German wounded soldiers going back west.

We arrived at the Blizyn labor camp not far from the Polish city of Radom. It was one of at least several of such slave labor camps where the prisoners must have been very skilled people, mostly Jewish.





However, also some were from other nations. The SS has controlled the camp very tightly. This camp was one of many satellites of the large camp of Lublin. The majority of the inmates had been employed by a variety of shops, which had been contributing to the German war effort. However, the prisoners were at the mercy of the commandant, as well as the guards and Kapos. Whoever was found not working the way the authorities wanted was shot or beaten to death or hanged. People who became sick were shot on the spot or transported to the officially called “special treatment,” which was an extermination camp.

The Blizyn camp employed skilled inmates by the Deutsche Austrüstung Werke, which means German armament works. They did pay some money to the SS system for the labor of prisoners. There were shops for shoemakers, tailors, as well as mechanical shops for the repair of vehicles of the SS or the army. There were also electricians and cooks as well as drivers of horse-drawn vehicles, and cars. Real expert masters in their skills had run the shops, supervised by the SS, noncoms and some civilian German technicians. The prisoner’s dwellings consisted of shabby wooden barracks with wooden bunks covered with straw several levels high, and carried all kinds of numbers. During the night very large barrels had been brought to serve as toilets. The smell during the night was unbearable. The wakeup call was 4:30 A.M., at which time people were given a fluid in casks called coffee. It was impossible to swallow it. Most of us used it to wash our faces. As time went on, I noticed that prisoners, who apparently gave up and did not wash their faces with “coffee,” most of them sooner or later died. We also had been given a piece of bread, and then there was a roll call at 5:15 or 5:30 A.M. We had to line up five in a row to be counted and afterwards we marched to work. The commandant of this slave labor camp was a middle-aged individual with a face that in the Soviet Union would have fetched him a five-year stay in Gulag. His last name was Nehl. The commandant’s favorite saying was, “Schisen und lachen,” which means to shoot and laugh. The SS staff consisted of young, very vicious, intensely indoctrinated, and fanatic Nazis, as well as some middle-aged civilian individuals. I do recall that one of them was a butcher from Stuttgart. This individual like some of his buddies had cruel habits increased by the feeling of superiority and power.

During a roll call and especially when it was raining, he used to lift his hand and stick out the thumb. When the thumb was up, we had to stand up, and when it was down, we had to fall to the ground. He could do this for half an hour while most of the guards laughed with great pleasure.

As the group of skilled workers in leather was brought into the shop, the chief master and boss in charge of the production met and interview them. The shop was rather big with many people working there



in two shifts day and night. The name of the boss, who was also a prisoner, was Mendel Fuks. He was a native of Chestochowa in Poland. He was a middle-aged individual, rather stout and of medium height. Naturally, most of this group had been real leather workers with experience. There had been maybe only four or five who like me pretended to know something about this kind of work.

When Mr. Fuks looked at me, he asked: "You want to tell me that you know how to repair leather products or any other related goods? It seems to me that you are a liar and a cheater and an imposter. However, I will stick out my neck and cover up for you and the other few like you. But you have to try by all means to learn the skills."

The big hall was occupied by about 60 workers, who had been sitting on special benches. In front of each was a wooden holder that could be screwed tighter or looser for the purpose of putting in a piece to be fixed.

I noticed that they were using two needles. I was worried, since I never held a needle in my hand. We started out by being taught how to use a workbench for leather repairs. It went on for days until I grasped some of the skills. Our shop was mostly involved in fixing the leather trimmings of the soldier's backpacks. Thousands had been brought to camp Blizyn, many still with dirt, blood, as well as damages probably from artillery shells and grenades. I surmised that the owners of most of them apparently had been killed or wounded. Some of these backpacks had the names written in ink. One name still remains in my memory today. It was written in thick ink: Kasulke.

The packs had been cleaned first in another shop, as well as the nonleather parts repaired, and then it was our task to finish the job.

As time went on, I became more and more proficient and skilled in the field. The winter was approaching and life was getting more difficult especially since we were not given enough food, so we were hungry and sometimes we were beaten both day and night under the supervision of the guards or the Kapos. Periodically, I was assigned to the night shift. In the middle of the night, we used to have a call to go to the toilet under guard. During such a call, we passed by the kitchen of the camp and the window was open. I grabbed one potato. The Ukrainian guard was going to shoot me because it was a rule that whoever stole a potato or more was to be shot on the spot. One of the prisoners whom I did not know smuggled all kinds of stuff through the fences, and had an "in" with the Ukrainian guard. He promised to give him a battle of vodka, thus saving my life.





Strange are the ways of destiny. This prisoner survived the war, lives in lower Manhattan, and was my patient for many years. As in the case of this individual, there were some others who showed how far the human spirit can go. Some of the prisoners used to bribe the guards, mostly Ukrainians, who allowed them to go through the fence to the outside population. They used to give butter, bread, potatoes for clothing, watches and some other items, which were scarce at this time outside of the fence. As the winter arrived, two iron stoves had been installed in our shop's major hall. This was a very welcome change, because we did not have to freeze while doing our work. Besides this, it helped some of us from starving. The main kitchen was in the middle of the camp and very early in the morning they used to bring in a truck, a flat, big vehicle. The kitchen personnel threw out on the truck large amounts of potato peels. Among them were small un-peeled potatoes. This was a treasure for many of us. We used to sneak out and jumped on the truck in search of the precious potatoes and then put them on a wire and baked them in the oven. It helped to quench the hunger. This was not without danger. Many times the chief Kapo of the kitchen used to come out with a whip with a couple of his helpers and whipped us.

In the course of a small potato expedition, an elderly Russian prisoner who came with us from Mogilev was badly whipped. He then said to me, "Please, you are young, you may survive, I will not. My son is a Soviet General and if you survive, please avenge me." I did promise him that.

SS personnel including officers and noncom had frequently inspected our shop as well as all others. Besides this, some civilian German masters used to check the quality and quantity of the repaired products.

Suddenly a disaster hit our camp. A typhus epidemic broke out and about 40 percent of the inmates died. There were mass burials in the forest area outside of the barracks. A rumor circulated that the backpacks of soldiers picked up on the battlefield had contained the lice and that was how the typhus epidemic started. Our lives had been hanging now on a thread, since it is known that the Germans were panicky afraid of lice. Lice decimated the German troops on the Russian front during World War I by causing severe typhus epidemics. History has mentioned that during the First World War, the shirt of many a Russian soldier had about 300,000 lice.

Several teams composed of SS officer's, officials and other experts came from the city of Lublin to assess the situation about the future of the Blizyn camp and its inmates. Apparently, there was still some





discussion about liquidating our camp and destroying all the prisoners, which had to take place in the better-equipped facility, or to leave the camp in existence since it was an important part and a source of skilled labor supporting the war effort of Germany.

As our King Solomon said so long ago: "Nothing could be hidden under the sun." No matter how much we were cut off from the world, there were all kinds of rumors. It was my experience during the war that some of the rumors were true. One of the rumors circulating was the possibility that the inmates from our camp would be transferred to the satellite concentration camp by the name of Trawniki.

Trawniki was originally a labor camp established in the fall of 1941 and was located outside of Lublin. It housed Soviet prisoners of war as well as Jews. As time went on, camp Trawniki was promoted to a training ground for guards in extermination camps. Among the "graduates" were some notorious sadists. Finally, the decision was made not to liquidate Blizyn.

In May of 1944, a group of skilled workers, among them the entire workforce of our leather workshop, as well as some other groups, were transferred to the concentration camp of Plaszow.

As we know now from the history of World War II, Hitler had already lost the war. Not only did he have a considerable shortage of manpower and gasoline but also a shortage of supplies. The military had Italian shovel holders from the First World War.

Our task was to help the workers in the huge local camp shop readjust the holders to German-size-and-type shovels. By this time, I was already a skilled worker and found myself among many prisoners who had to do the job in a hurry.

The Plaszow camp was notorious for inhumane, vicious and horrible terrors, which were amplified by the reign of the sadistic and cruel commandant Amon Goeth. He was Austrian by nationality, born into a middle-or upper-middle- class family. He attended, among other universities, the University of Munich, which I went to after the war.

Plaszow was situated in Southern Poland out side of Krakow's city limits on a site of two Jewish cemeteries. When I arrived there, and was waiting to be processed, I noticed that I was sitting on gravestones. It started as a work camp in 1942, and then in January of 1944, Plaszow was made a concentration camp. From time to time, the camp was enlarged and in 1944 it was extended for 200 acres.



During its existence, Plaszow contained 150,000 civilian prisoners. That number varied from time to time, and in May of 1944 when I arrived there, the number was about 22,000 to 24,000 including 6,000-8,000 Jews from Hungary. In the early stages, there were also about 1000 Polish prisoners and that number rose to about 10,000 after the Warsaw uprising. The camp also contained German criminals, who were employed as Kapos and had other various duties. There was also a group of German homosexuals.

Amon Goeth, the camp commandant, from February 1943 to September 1944 rampaged in a delirious frenzy and personally committed heinous crimes of mass murder. Nobody was safe. He would go among workers and say to one of them: "Hey, you are too slow" and shoot him right on the spot. One day he came to our shop and pointed to two people who had been suspected of bringing bread from the outside of the camp, and shot one of them right away. The other one leaned over the body, started to cry, and talked to the dead man: "Why did you do it, you should not have done it. I told you not to do it." And believe it, this saved his life for the time being. Until 1944, most of the camp guards were Ukrainians and other Nazi sympathizers; however, when Plaszow became a real concentration camp, a couple hundred SS men came in as guards from the other SS units.

In Plaszow, there was a notorious hill, which was called in Polish Chujowa gorka (the Penile Hill). This was the place for all the executions, and many Poles who had been sentenced for patriotic activities were brought there and shot. I do not know exactly how many of these young people died. On several occasions, SS guards picked up some members of my group including myself and took us to a nearby forest to get some branches from trees. These branches were used to cover bodies on Penile Hill in layers and then burned. Also, as the Soviet forces were moving west and the news was getting worse and worse on the eastern front, Himmler had ordered the excavation of the bodies of 2,000 Jews murdered on the streets of Krakow on March 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of 1943 during the liquidation of the Krakow Ghetto. At this time most of the people had been deported to the Belzec extermination camp and the 8,000 remaining were incarcerated in Plaszow camp. These 2,000 bodies taken from the streets had been buried in Plaszow. This was my "extracurricular activity" with some other prisoners, to dig out those bodies, pile them between the layers of wood and then burn them. This was not the only attempt by Germans to obliterate all the traces of these horrible crimes, since in January of 1945 about 9,000 bodies of Jews were exhumed and cremated.

The Plaszow camp had a huge part of it devoted to manufacturing all kinds of products and works for the war effort. It contained many very well-skilled Jewish workers and many not so skilled, but they





acquired the experience and skills as time went on. As the military situation was getting more and more catastrophic, plans were made to evacuate the camp. However, they tried to preserve the most skilled workers as long as possible. On one morning in the beginning of August 1944, I was called to the office headed by a Jewish lady. Her name was Mrs. Kartuzowa. She was from Krakow and was in charge of the roster of very skilled workers. She took out my card, asked my name and date of birth and knew that I was working in the leather shop. She said to me: "You are one of the masters in your shop." I said that I was not a master, but she insisted that I was, and marked my card with a red diagonal line. This basically saved my life. It looks as if I have luck with women from Krakow since my wife Teresa is also from Krakow.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of August, the entire camp was mobilized on the Appel platz, which means the lineup place, and they called out names of the most important workers, myself among them.

The rest of the people, 15,000 or more, were immediately shipped out to Auschwitz and Mathausen in Austria, both notorious extermination camps. I did remain in Plaszow till about mid-October, at which time I was sent to Gros-Rosen, a horrible concentration camp in lower Silesia. For me it was maybe a short reprieve, since one did not have to go directly to the gas chamber. There were all kinds of chances like in a lottery, or they worked you to death in the stone quarries, or they shot you, or hanged you. However, there was a slim chance if you were sent to one of the many satellite camps in this region that you might have an opportunity to live a little longer.

My commandant at Plaszow, Amon Goeth, captain of the SS, also had a reprieve from the gallows for a while. In September of 1944, he left Plaszow for Brinnitz in Czechoslovakia where Oscar Schindler, who was his friend or acquaintance, gave him some kind of an opportunity to stay. Goeth had many valuables, maybe antiques, as the rumor went, which were packed in crates, and the prisoners noted his address in Austria. Apparently, he went back to where he came from, and was picked up by the American military, and entered Dahau, the former concentration camp. At some point, Dahau had about 20,000 suspected war criminals under arrest. Many of the suspects had been walking on a stage used as a lineup, where hundreds of former concentration camp inmates had been asked to identify them as their oppressors.

Amon Goeth, who during his reign of terror, as an "angel of death" in Plaszow, never imagined he would be walking as a prisoner himself in the lineup. At this time, he looked subdued, haggard, asking permission to pick up cigarette butts from the floor. He finally was extradited by the American military



authorities to Poland, and was put on trial, during which a woman, who had worked in the office in Plaszow, produced some incriminating documentation, which she had buried. She did survive the war and appeared as a witness. Goeth, acting as his own defense attorney, stated that these documents were stolen and as such could not be introduced into evidence. He was sentenced to death and hanged in the former concentration camp in Plaszow in 1946.

The source of the historical and statistical information about Plaszow, Grossrosen and some other mentioned camps is the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust.

In 1940, Gros-Rosen was established as a satellite camp of Sachsenhausen and was built in the vicinity of a granite quarry. By May 1941, the camp “graduated” to become an independent entity not only as such, but as time went on, it became the “mother camp” for dozens of smaller work camps in the neighboring area of lower Silesia. The number of prisoners in the very beginning of 1941 was 1,487 and it grew on the eve of the camp’s liquidation in 1945 to approximately over 50,000 prisoners. Some statistics point to the fact that at the final stage of Gros-Rosen, there was a prisoner population of 78,000: 52,000 men and 26,000 women representing 11 percent of all the prisoners then in Nazi concentration camps. The number of victims who perished in Gros-Rosen was about 40,000 and most of them were Jewish.

As it was the policy in any other camp, many German criminals were sent there to assure positions of power as Kapos and also leaders and managers of barracks. They all were eventually known for their sadistic and brutal behavior. The living and working conditions of the Jewish prisoners were inhuman, very harsh, sadistic and claimed many lives by beatings, starvation and cold, as well as backbreaking labor in the huge quarry.

On October 15<sup>th</sup> 1944, I arrived at Gros-Rosen along with other prisoners. Our cattle cars had reached the outskirts of the camp by rail. It was autumn and the days were cold and dreary. We had been totally undressed and put in a certain waiting location where we were standing shivering overnight. At this time, I did not know that among the prisoners were several future colleagues, whom I met in medical school after the war. Next morning, the reception was rough and full of curses and intimidation. Especially hateful and vicious was a short and thin SS guard. It took all day to get processed, no food was given, and at night I





found myself in barrack #9 with 900 people. There was no place to sleep except on the floor. If one needed to go to the so-called “men’s room,” upon return, his floor space was taken by an other prisoner.

In the morning, we got breakfast consisting of “ersatz” coffee, which meant a substitute for coffee, and a small piece of bread. We were lined up in the front of barrack #9 and had to stand for 10 hours without moving. This was a special torture because by standing for so long without moving, blood was not pumped back from the extremities to the heart and people fainted and fell like flies. The block leader by the name of Alois was an Austrian, and an accomplished sadist. This again proved that, although he was himself a prisoner, with just a little bit of power bestowed on him, he courted sadism.

I was surprised on some of the mornings to see a band composed of prisoners dressed in bizarre clothing of all colors marching through the streets of the camp and playing music. Finally after about a week or nine days of standing for 10-12 hours, we were gathered in an area where we stood lined up and the SS noncom came with the list and he called out names that we understood were to be assigned to work details at different satellite work camps. I was called, and for some reason, which I never could explain, I did not step out. He screamed repeatedly, “Where is the Schwine?” and then proceeded to call the rest of the names on the list. It was my luck that I did not go with this outfit of 50 people, who were sent to some neighboring stone quarry. After the war in 1948 in a DP camp, I met a young man, Mr. Engelberg. He was the man called out before me, and the sole survivor of the 50 people called out that morning. Two days after this episode, I was called again, and had no choice. I do not know exactly how many people, maybe a 100, went with me to the trucks. Apparently, we were going to some other location, which turned out to be the Langenbielau camp where I was liberated. It was located in lower Silesia, also near the town by the same name. On the way, U.S. bombers flew over the highway where our trucks had been moving. We were immediately ordered to get out of the trucks and lie down in the field together with the SS guards. Sometime later, we reached Langenbielau. It should be pointed out that Lower and Upper Silesia contained numerous factories, which had been producing not only armaments, but also some other items important for the German war effort. Therefore, there still were many small work camps where some young prisoners were spared for the time being to supplement or to replace the forced labor. They all were at this time of the war malnourished, burned out and less productive.

My new camp had a nickname “Sportschule” because it was located in the area where previously there was a school for sports for the Hitlerjugend. In comparison to the “mother camp,” Gros-Rosen, it was a





“resort place.” Hard labor, yes, food scanty, sporadic beatings mostly by the Kapos, but no unnecessary torturing or shooting at will by the guards. I am not able to furnish an exact number of prisoners in our camp. By estimate, maybe between 1,200 to 1,500 people. All of us had been assigned to various work details.

Originally, I was assigned to work that took me through various armament factories. After a while, maybe several months, I was assigned to a large group of prisoners to dig trenches for the German army including also participating in construction of anti-tank obstructions, which included digging out tremendous ditches. Because of the depth, at many times we hit water and we had to stand in it above our knees or higher. As winter came on, our suffering was getting worse. After digging in the forest for five to six hours, we were allowed a-half-an-hour rest during which time I was completely exhausted. I used to lie down on the snow and sleep very soundly. Trucks took us to the place of work, and brought us back to the camp late at night. We had to get up at 4:30 A.M. to the horrible sound of a hammer on a piece of metal. We gathered on the appelpplatz for a very thorough head count to make sure that no one had escaped. We got a piece of bread and a warm substitute for coffee, which was only good for washing your hands and face. Then we were taken in the horrible weather conditions to trenches where we dug under the watchful eyes of elderly SS guards. We Jews used to joke that the real vicious SS died under Stalingrad, and we had the “ersatz.”

In the beginning of February 1945, we started to hear thunder and more thunder day and night. Of course, this was not thunder because of the storm; it was the thunder of the Soviet artillery. We understood that the front was coming close to us. It was the worst time psychologically and physically. We were exhausted after almost four years of hell on earth: violent death looming daily, starvation, beatings and hard labor. The liberation was getting closer and closer, but death was closer. The thought was very painful that after such a horrible ordeal, it would be a pity and injustice to perish right now when the end of the nightmare was almost over. However, the pangs of hunger and cold overshadowed these very depressing thoughts.

At this time, the Nazis had some confusion, and they did not know exactly what to do considering that some of the camps had already been liberated. There was an order from Himmler that no camp inmate should fall into the hands of the Allies alive. They started to shuttle the prisoners from Dahau to



Buchenwald, from Grossrosen to Dahau and all around to all of the camps in Germany. In many instances this included very notorious marches during which the majority of the prisoners died from hunger and exhaustion or by being shot. Naturally, I did not know anything about it at that time. Our camp was no exception. The commandant of the camp SS captain Karl Ulbrich allegedly an engineer by profession, and several of his aids as well as a physician himself a prisoner conducted a selection of sick, weak and disabled inmates. All of these individuals have been earmarked for evacuation by train to Dahau. The entire sickbay was emptied and many other prisoners have been included in the transport.

On the memorable day of February 15<sup>th</sup> 1945, I participated, together with other prisoners to transport these poor souls. We placed the starving, emaciated and dying prisoners on lorries, which we had to push for 7 kilometers over a narrow tract rail line from the camp all the way to the main railroad station of the city of Reichenbach. A grotesque, large slogan was written on the building of the station that read: "Zuerst Siegen, dan reisen" which meant in English: "First victory, and then traveling." The prisoners have been loaded into two cattle cars, which have been standing for two days on a station in very cold winter weather.

Later, after the war, I found out that these two cattle cars went to Dahau. Upon arrival there, 90 percent of the people were dead, those who were still breathing died later.

Shortly thereafter, we were taken to a location where we were housed in a former guesthouse, where we slept on the floor. We did continue to dig anti-tank trenches for the German army. The landscape of this part of Lower Silesia was very beautiful: mountains, forests, and nicely manicured lawns around houses where children played. Some of the young guards were flirting with the girls. On occasion, some women from the surrounding houses brought us potatoes. It felt in the air that the regime was a little lighter. It was already spring and we continued digging. I did develop an abscess on the skin of my abdomen. You cannot be sick under the SS rule. There was a medic, a middle-aged man, who with a plain razor blade opened the abscess, and it healed.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of May, while standing in the trenches, we suddenly heard a whistle. The noncom ordered us to get out of the trenches. There was a little girl playing in the woods and I overheard her saying to the noncom: "Yes, our beloved Fuhrer is dead." I was concerned with what would happen to us now. We went back to the guesthouse where we had been staying. We found some bottles with paste like ketchup. We





were hungry so we ate some, and it burned like hell. There were rumors going around that they would blow up our camp. Frankly, at this time, I couldn't think anymore, and I was not afraid. Why? Maybe, I was already burned out, and had no more stamina left in me. I was just so very hungry.

Our camp elder, Mr. Baruch Meister, a Jewish prisoner, had an idea, which was not too bad, but not the greatest. He was a smart fellow. The commandant of our camp Ulbrich received an order in February from the higher ups, to take us on an evacuation march. Mr. Meister spoke to Ulbrich and pointed out that we were surrounded already by Soviet troops. "If you don't take us on a march, we will try to help you when the Russians come," Mr. Meister said. He promised him that the tailors in our camp would change his SS uniform to one of an army officer. The same would be done to the uniforms of the SS noncoms. It worked. The camp commandant agreed, and disobeyed the death-march order. The close Soviet artillery thunder maybe helped make up his mind.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of May, the SS and the guards left, as well as the SS commandant captain Ulbrich and his aides. As he left, he said good-bye to the camp elder Baruch Meister. Naturally, the promise was kept and the tailors did a good job. We had our usual daily lineup on the Appelplatz and Meister said, "Stay at attention and sing the Hatikva," (the Jewish national anthem of hope). Following this, he gave the order to disband as free people.

As I left, at the gate stood two young German army soldiers, who said to me: "Do not worry, we are the rear guard and we are leaving." And they left.

I was freed near a very charming German town by the name of Reichenbach. It took some courage for many of the inmates still in their prisoner's attire to go to town. While some ventured to town, four Russian soldiers, very young with submachine guns came through the gate and since I spoke Russian, I asked them: "What are you looking for here? It is a concentration camp." They were from Kamentz-Podolsk, Western Ukraine. I was told they belonged to a punitive battalion and they were hungry. After hearing this I did not want to discuss anything anymore, I took them to the SS kitchen where pots with food were still on the stove. We sat down, and we ate. I did not eat too much, because I knew that if one is starved for such a prolonged time, the stomach shrinks. A number of my coprisoners overate and died later. We learned later that this happened in many other camps. After these four soldiers left, a Soviet major came, driving in with a civilian passenger, wearing a big cross on his chest, which surprised me, and



holding a rifle in his hand. The major's name was Denisenko. After he spoke to me, recognizing my fluent Russian, he announced that I would be the chief of police. I declined the offer saying I was too weak and fatigued. The truth was I was too hungry to be a police chief. He left. Maybe two or three hours later, a Russian captain came in by the name of Konovalov. He apparently was an official person from the staff of the Soviet commandant of the city garrison.

At this point I was holding a chicken which one of my roommates brought me from the city. The chicken was already killed, and I was contemplating what to do with it, when the captain asked, "Who speaks Russian here?" I stepped forward. He asked me to interpret what he was about to say. He put me on a chair and I put the chicken under it, not knowing anyhow what to do with it. He said that they liberated us from this horrible system, and now we were free people. We could do whatever we wished, and go anywhere we chose. I thanked the captain for the liberation and for saving our lives. I took him on a tour of our camp, and naturally I showed him the sickbay where the sick prisoners were lying mostly on the floor, covered by ulcers, malnourished and dying mostly of hunger and beatings, as well as infections.

The captain was very shocked and very upset by the sight. Most of the prisoners threw away prisoner's garb, the notorious striped uniform, and wore old kind of civilian clothing. After a while he left. Following this I also ventured to the nearby city of Reichenbach and, on the way, I spotted on the road two dead prisoners in striped clothing. This upset me, because the Germans already had been gone for two days. Later, I found out that Russian soldiers did not understand them, had never seen this kind of uniform and they just killed them. Possibly, I speculated, members of a punitive unit did it.

In the city, I had seen a lot of abandoned German weapons. I met several Russian officers; one of them spoke to me in Yiddish and this moved me very much. I returned to the camp, since at this moment there was no place to go.

The next morning, a Soviet staff car arrived. Two officers got out, one of them a colonel by the name of Soloncev who was from Leningrad. With him was a first lieutenant and both of them were Jewish. When they saw the entire setup of the camp and the former inmates, the junior officer started to cry. I briefed them about all the events that had happened to us. He immediately took me to his headquarters.

Soloncev was a very important staff officer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Soviet army who came from Stalingrad to lower Silesia. He was a liaison between the headquarters of this army and the Russian units. I was given a





bath, a haircut, a shave, nice clean underwear and a suit. It didn't fit me too well; however, it looked rather ordinary. Soloncev kind of adopted me. He took me in his Mercedes driven by his staff sergeant, whom he allegedly saved in a battle. He drove all over the region where he had to deal with matters of importance regarding the civilian population. I was a translator and I also took notes.

According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia data, the surviving prisoners of this region where I was, fared much better than prisoners in other locations. In my camp, Langenbielau, all 1,400 inmates were liberated as survivors. After the liberation of these satellite camps, a Jewish committee had been formed to take care of the survivors, many of whom were sick. A large number of former Grossrosen prisoners were gathered in Dzierzanow (in German Reichenbach). On July 17, 1945, there was a convention of the representatives of the Jewish committees of six lower Silesia towns and the district committee of the Polish Jews was formed. The purpose of it was to coordinate activities on behalf of the survivors and to assist them in returning to their countries.

I would like to point out that under the soviet regime forming committees or gathering were basically prohibited. However, Lt.Colonel Soloncev was very helpful in mitigating the rules and helped me and some others to form a committee of former prisoners. Soloncev also gave us food, clothing and general care. Since he was a higher-up in the 21<sup>st</sup> army, he also introduced me to the commanding general Gusev, who was sympathetic to our tasks. We had been given army trucks with drivers who took many of us to the cemeteries near the camps for memorials and for laying flowers. Finally, I was given the task of assisting allied military missions in recovering prisoners or civilian workers in these areas. I also was going with Russian and German doctors to various hospitals to organize the repatriation of former inmates, as well as some prisoners of war, to their countries. At this point, my friend and benefactor lieutenant colonel Soloncev was transferred to Vienna. He asked me if I would like to return to Poland. I declined, since I did not expect anyone from my family to be alive there anymore. As a sentimental memento, a picture of me with Soloncev has stood for decades on my desk.

My last assignment was to work with the Dutch military mission. We went to different camps to try to retrieve some records of Dutch prisoners. Phillips Company from Holland was helpful in sending out the





means of transportation: busses and ambulances to speed up the reparation of Dutch citizens. During the last visit with the Dutch mission, I asked the Dutch colonel in charge if I could be transferred to anywhere in the west. He explained to me that it was impossible for me to go to Holland in view of the lack of food and the floods caused by the war. However, being sympathetic to my situation, he offered to take me to Czechoslovakia.

As history showed, I was right. There was no way to return to Eastern Europe, which was a mass grave of my people. Further developments in Poland have proven that there was no place anymore for Jews.

I had a large family in the United States including a grandmother. The Dutch mission commander kept his promises and took me to the city of Prague. He had a diplomatic passport. I had nothing. On the border, Russian troops stopped us and they questioned the commander for an hour. I kept quiet. If by any chance Russians should find out that I spoke Russian, they would have sent me to Siberia. They asked the Colonel if I was a Hollander. He said yes and they let us through. I spent several weeks in Prague in a place with many other survivors. We had food and provisions, probably through some Jewish organizations. Later on they also were able to take us across the Bavarian border to Munich. This was about the end of November 1945.

The city of Munich was bombed out; it was depressing and sad. With many other former concentration camp prisoners I had been put on a train and sent to a small, very picturesque town, Volfratzhausen, in Southern Bavaria. From there we had been taken by busses to a nearby settlement, which used to house foreign workers employed in a nearby ammunition factory. The American army organized it as a DP (Displaced persons) camp called Foerenwald, and the United Nations relief administration (UNRA) was managing it. There were many little houses with streets named after American States. I was living on Indiana Street No.13.

Within a short time, while wandering in the camp area, I met many people from different countries. It was interesting and fascinating to mingle in this melting pot. In contrast where all of them and myself came from, you might have called it a paradise, as you compared it with the hell that we endured for years. Most of us, young people as a group, had been orphans. Not only did we lose our families but we also lost our way of life and our countries, and faced an uncertain future. We tried to survive from day to day. In



general, we were not discouraged or depressed. There were few elderly people, some middle aged, most of them widows and widowers. There were not too many couples who survived this holocaust.

That was the early beginning of a new life for us survivors as we came out from the ashes. Our camp had the designation of UNRA team 106. Slowly, we started to have a more organized and ordinary way of life. We had our own police force, naturally not armed, and a fire department. There was also a hospital run by Jewish physicians who survived the war. There were also offices for the administration. We had our own council working together with the American authorities and other rescue organizations. We were free to move around and travel anyplace if one could afford it. We started to engage in sports activities, lectures and cinemas.

I will never forget the day when General Dwight D. Eisenhower came to visit the camp along with some other generals. At this time, I did not speak a word of English and I did not understand what he was asking us. He proceeded to the camp theater where most of us had been assembled. He gave a very moving speech, which was translated to us. He gave us hope for the future.

Early after the war, an American army chaplain came across a list of survivors and he apparently made it public in New York. My close family was living in New York. It consisted of my paternal grandmother as well as two uncles, Arthur and George. They were brothers of my father. It was George who found my name on the published list of survivors. Of course, they were very anxious to get in touch with me but at this point it was not known where I was, and there was no way to contact me. One morning, I was called to the main office by the director of the camp who told me an American army major was looking for me. I met him in my room. His name was Stanley Gould; he was very charming, handsome and somewhat deaf. He spoke in English to me and somebody helped with the translation. As it turned out, he was a cousin from my mother's side. My parents had a large family in Pittsburgh and among them was my mother's cousin Julius Block. At some point, he visited us in Suwalki before the war. After the liberation, I wrote a letter to him and it landed in the hands of an Afro-American lady by the name of Block. Since it was written in Yiddish, she promptly took the letter to Dr. Steinberg, her dentist, to decipher the contents. As it happens, Dr. Steinberg was a cousin of the major. He realized who I was, so he contacted the major in





Germany to look me up in the DP camp. Stanley was born in the USA in Pittsburgh. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge in the artillery. He brought with him a paper of the family tree, which explained to me how we were related. Of course, he was very happy to see me as the only survivor of a huge family. Originally, he was stationed in the city of Nuremberg and later he was transferred to Munich, where he was a member of the military government.

As time went on, we heard the rumor that in Munich, in the huge not-bombed-out hall of the Deutsches Museum (German Museum), a university would be opened for foreigners who were in DP camp, and who had the credentials and desire to continue or proceed with their education. It was called UNRA University. Naturally, it did not take too much time before many candidates from all over, mostly from Bavaria, rushed to register. Not all of them were Jewish. Some were former officers from the Polish army or others who had been kept as POW's in Murnau or former non-Jewish concentration camp inmates. It was a very mixed ethnic group. Myself and many colleagues from the DP Ferenwald camp became students in this institution. We were a little upset that this was not a university with tradition. The faculty was very hastily assembled and could not function in a coordinated and meaningful way. Also, a great handicap was the poor knowledge of the German language by the faculty members who came from different countries, mostly from the east. Some of them allegedly had been Nazi collaborators during the war. As an example of such, was a youngish-looking professor whose name was Sirotenko. He started a lecture by saying that he did not speak German too well and then he continued that someday we might pass by a monument and read: "Here lies professor Sirotenko, who died of the German language."

Most of us started to think about trying to matriculate in the very famous and traditional Ludvik Maximilian University of Munich. The problem was that many of the laboratories and lecture halls of the institution had been bombed out. As time went on, some repairs were made, and at the end of the spring of 1946, we did switch over to this university while UNRA University was closed. Munich was a beautiful and charming city with a great deal of museums, theaters and an opera house. Slowly, but surely, it started its revival in many aspects. It was a seat of the military government of the USA for Bavaria. Besides UNRA, there were numerous relief organizations that were not only Jewish, but also run by other denominations. The American Joint Distribution Committee was a very well known, effective and helpful Jewish organization, which tried to bring in order and hope among former concentration camp inmates. Also, a Jewish community committee was formed, which was recognized by the American military authorities, as



well as by the German administration of Bavaria. Last but not least, we created a Jewish student organization that was run by democratic rules with a president, vice president and secretary as well as a council. This organization was very effective and helpful in dealing with the local German authorities regarding living quarters for students, and many other problems, which were solved most of the time in a satisfactory fashion. Also, they dealt very successfully with the Bavarian Ministry of Education regarding the admission of eligible students to different faculties including medicine, dentistry and Technische Hochschule (Technical School of Higher Education), which had a very good world reputation. We also had about three subsidized restaurants for Jewish students. There was no tuition at any of the schools for former victims who had been persecuted by the Nazi regime.

I would like to emphasize that the German professors basically had sympathy for us, treated us fairly and nicely and respected us. This could be attributed to the will, determination and the emotional strength we exhibited in pursuing our goal in education and our hope for a better future. All students from all the faculties were working very hard to graduate, to have a profession and start a new life.

At the end of July 1946, my cousin Major Stanley Gould picked me up and drove me to his station in Nuremberg where the famous trial of the Nazi war criminals was taking place.

On July 31, an American lieutenant took me to the Palace of Justice with a pass. I spent the day at the trial. It was for me a very emotional and unforgettable event. Among the other thoughts I had while sitting there was how lucky I was in having a second chance when 55 million people had perished during the Second World War. I had made my way from the ghetto of Slonim and the camp of Mogilev among others to this Palace of Justice.

As time went on, the living conditions in Munich had improved for us as well as for the German population. My relatives in the USA had already been able to contact me by letter. They used to send me some money and packages of clothing.

I always wanted to be a doctor and to me everybody who needed help as well as counseling was equal regardless of origin or any other considerations. While I was in the clinical semesters, I had a patient in the clinic, who was a very sick man. He had Bright's disease, which means very high blood pressure with





chronic, basically fatal kidney involvement. He was a former SS officer. When he was ready to be discharged, he wanted the only Jewish student to take him home. I explained to him that I was very poor, I had no car, and even if I had one at this point, I did not know how to drive. Well, I brought him home by taxi. Following this, he started to visit me. He used to cook for me, and his final request was that I should be present at his autopsy and attend his funeral. I complied in all of this.

Strange are the ways of destiny. In anticipation of my immigrating someday to the USA, I started to take English lessons from a former German officer who was stationed in Minsk, White Russia.

On many occasions, different people from all walks of life had questioned me. Why is it that after the war I did not mind studying in Germany? The answer is very simple, obvious and sad. Eastern Europe including Poland was the biggest cemetery of our people. However, majority of my countrymen still remained hostile to us Jews, making a return to Poland very difficult, if not impossible. Also nobody was there whom I loved and missed. The most frequent and typical question asked of Jews returning to Eastern Europe was: "How is it that you are still alive and what are you doing here?" It is understandable that most of us did not want to be subjected to this kind of environment of hate and contempt. So, frankly, I felt much more safe and comfortable in postwar Germany.

Among the letters from my uncles and cousins, the most poignant were the letters from my grandmother. She could hardly wait to see me. Unfortunately, she died before I arrived. Many of my colleagues from the university arrived in the USA before me, and only a few after me. Yet we continued to consider ourselves as an adopted family, since our experiences during the war, as well as the hardships it took to make it as students, brought us closer together. These feelings have continued to the present day.

It was a wonderful moment for me to see the Statue of Liberty and to arrive in the land of the free. Most Munich graduates scattered all over the country with the majority in New York State. The requirements for licensing us were probably easier in other states than in New York. Since Germany was so devastated after the war, the American authorities were under the impression that the graduates from the German University could not meet American standards. We were required to take postgraduate courses,









some for one year and some for two years, after which we were licensed as physicians, dentists and other professions. Finally, I started my internship with a salary of \$75 a month plus room and board.

Most of us did not mind the hard work and the very low pay, since we had been so motivated to learn and gain the experience of the American system, which was at this time superior to all others in the world. The more I progressed in my training and knowledge; I got more fascinated with the field I had chosen and dreamed of since I was a child. What was most interesting was that I was also in the middle of the melting pot of New York City. My ability to speak fluent Polish, German, Russian, Yiddish a little Hebrew and French was a great help in handling so many patients of such diverse backgrounds. It was a challenge, an accomplishment and a pleasure.

After I finished my residency at New York Medical College, I became a Junior Attending in medicine. I started to practice in Yorkville, which was a known German community for many years with old country flavor. There were restaurants, shops, and even a pharmacist who spoke German. Many of the inhabitants were poor, old and sick, living mostly in walk-ups. There was a lot of sadness and grief during the 33 years of my practice in this area. I fought fiercely for each life. If some of my patients could not walk three or four flights of stairs to see me in the office, I used to make house calls regardless of the time of day or night. I used to also give talks and lectures devoted to health problems at the Mozart Hall, during which time we ate some sandwiches and drank beer. I was also very proud to take care of my uncles and cousins, as well as some friends and their families.

As time went on, I started to teach students at New York Medical College, which was an enormous challenge and achievement. When I think of it now, I kind of laugh. It was a far cry from my foray into medicine in my camp in Mogilev when I treated sciatica in an anecdotal way with hot water and urine. My academic rank was Assistant Professor of Medicine.

American medicine was making very rapid progress in each field and it became the mecca of medicine for many foreign physicians, teachers and researchers. I remember that some years later after the war, many European professors came to the USA to get an idea as to what was happening in every field of medicine. I was very happy that I was in the center of it. Many years later when I did receive an award for “Excellence in Medicine,” I pointed out in my thank-you speech that I was lucky to come from the killing fields of Europe to the healing fields of America. I was also very lucky and thankful to reach the shores of a





country where people have freedom, dignity, tolerance and where everyone, regardless of his country of origin or religion, is equal. All my personal sufferings and tragedies, as well as those of the other human beings I witnessed, made me a better person.

The human race did not learn from the past. The modern world is full of hatred, cruelty, and lack of compassion and understanding for other fellow men. Strange is the behavior and thinking of our fellow men starting with violence and destruction on the family level, propagating it-self to nations and all kinds of societies throughout the world.

The tremendous progress in technology and science makes life easy and also prolongs it. This is the domain of civilization. But what happened to the progress of human behavior and spirit from the caveman until now? With all my horrible experiences, I do not hate. The only hate I indulge in is the hate of hate itself!

Hitler's epilogue to the final solution was to have 40 or 60 remaining Jews put in a museum, most probably in Prague, Czechoslovakia. Luckily for us it did not work out this way. Thousands of us who survived the war had the strength, determination and motivation to tell the world our story, and continue to live a productive life, which one could call a resurrection. Many of us, whether in other continents or in the USA, became professionals or experts in many fields in all aspects of life. Most of us started to build families with children and lived to see grandchildren.

I am married and I have two children. My son Jeffrey is an attorney, married; he lives in New York City. My daughter Elizabeth is also married; she is a student at NYU, and working toward masters in nutrition, and resides in New Jersey.

My wife Teresa, a native of Krakow, Poland, as a child during the Holocaust, was saved by Polish nuns. She is a graduate of Jagiellonian University in Krakow. As a microbiologist, she was looking for a job and got a permanent one working with me in my medical office. She was involved in every aspect of it!

Now as I am retired, I have more time to reflect on my past. I do not know what tomorrow will bring, but today, I continue to search and study the psychology of the Holocaust aided by books and all other modern means. I am involved in many discussions on the subject with my children, their spouses

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes the need for transparency and accountability in financial reporting.

2. The second part of the document outlines the various methods and techniques used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed description of the experimental procedures and the statistical analysis performed.

3. The third part of the document presents the results of the study. It includes a series of tables and graphs that illustrate the findings. The data shows a clear trend of increasing values over time, which is consistent with the theoretical predictions.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the implications of the findings. It highlights the potential applications of the research in various fields, including economics, engineering, and social sciences. The study also identifies some limitations and suggests areas for future research.

5. The fifth part of the document provides a conclusion and summarizes the main points of the study. It reiterates the significance of the findings and the need for further research in this area.

6. The sixth part of the document includes a list of references and a bibliography. It cites the works of other researchers in the field, providing a context for the current study.

7. The seventh part of the document contains a list of appendices and supplementary materials. These include additional data, figures, and tables that are not included in the main text.

Patricia and Nicholas, also with many individuals of different backgrounds. My goal is to propagate tolerance, understanding and the rejection of stereotyping. We should continue to remember victims of all nations who perished during the Second World War, and learn how to respect and live with each other in peace and tranquility.

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